

**Toxics Link (www.toxicslink.org)**

**Toxics Link : E-waste**

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### **Is India becoming dumping ground for British e-waste?**

New Delhi, 24/09/2004

**By Kishore Wankhade**

#### **Fast facts**

- Lead, brominated flame-retardants, beryllium, hexavalent chromium, PVC plastics, cadmium, and antimony are found in computer parts.
- Movements of hazardous wastes of all kinds is meant to be defined, and controlled or prohibited under the terms of the Basel Convention – an international treaty under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme.
- It's high time for the Government of India to ratify the **Basel Convention** and Ban, and implement the Hazardous Waste Rules, 2002 to check the **illegal imports of e-waste**.

#### **The story in detail**

There are concerns in Indian civil society over reports in the British media saying that Britain is throwing out more than a million tonnes of "e-waste" every year. A Guardian report recently, said that, last year, 23,000 tonnes of IT and other electronic equipment was shipped out illegally, mostly to China, West Africa, Pakistan and India.

It said, in one instance, documents on a container waiting to be shipped from Felixstowe to Pakistan declared that its contents were innocuous plastic packaging. But when customs officers opened it up they found tonnes of broken computer monitors and other electronic waste collected by a south Wales Company, which was sending it to Lahore to be dismantled by hand for its lead and other valuable toxic contents. The illegal shipment of hazardous waste was reportedly blocked and returned.

"We have been repeatedly stating over two years that tonnes of e-waste is landing in various Indian ports every year for recycling," says, Ravi Agarwal, Director, Toxics Link. He adds, we were not able to substantiate our statements on e-waste imports because, there is no access to customs data in this country, and that this particular incident in Britain supports our claim that e-waste is dumped illegally in India by various developed countries like USA and UK.

This is high time for Govt and the Port Authorities to implement the Hazardous Waste, Rules and check the illegal imports of hazardous e-waste at the entry points itself. E-waste is included in the List A and B of Schedule 3 of the Hazardous Waste Rules, where its import is restricted and cannot be allowed to import without license. Till date the Ministry has issued not a single license for imports. Thus, the imports are illegal and could be coming in mislabeled. "There are cases of mislabeling of the content in the containers and at the time of bill of entry in the port", says K.S. Sudhakar of Toxics Link Chennai, he traced one container of e-waste, mislabeled as metal scrap, at the Chennai Port earlier this year.

According to the British pollution watchdog Environment Agency, e-waste exports are worth hundreds of millions of pounds. Last year, such waste involved tens of thousands of old computers, 500,00 television sets, three million refrigerators, 160,000 tonnes of other electrical equipment and millions of discarded mobile phones, all sent to the Asian countries like India, China and Pakistan.

But the Guardian report also said the agency admitted it had no idea how much of the waste was being deliberately dumped on in Asian countries by companies trying to avoid paying increasingly high disposal costs in Britain, and how much was only technically illegal because companies filled in the forms incorrectly.

"It is not necessarily all illegal," according to an agency spokesman. "There is a legitimate international trade in goods, with an overseas market for usable equipment such as computers and TVs. Further work will help us to find out how much is illegal. Our investigations suggest some exporters are not seeking the appropriate legal authorization."

"The trade is absolutely illegal and against the spirit of Basel Convention", says Kishore Wankhade, of Toxics Link in Delhi. The electronic waste contains several hazardous and toxic materials like lead; mercury, cadmium, PVC plastics and Brominated Flame Retardants. These materials are dangerous to Environment and Human health, if disposed improperly. He adds, the Indian e-waste recycling system, is a combination of several hazardous processes, and is not technically and economically equipped to handle the in-house generated electronic waste.

There is a constant threat looming over India, as e-waste like this is always headed towards developing countries such as India, Pakistan and China. Over the years Toxics Link has released several groundbreaking reports on the status of e-waste, which have revealed that more than 70% of electronic waste collected in the recycling units in Delhi was actually exported or dumped by developed countries such as USA. In India this waste is subjected to primitive and highly polluting recycling operations, which contaminate the community and impact the health of workers. We fear that already, mobile phone waste is on the move from rich to poor countries.

Movements of hazardous wastes of all kinds is meant to be defined, and controlled or prohibited under the terms of the Basel Convention – an international treaty under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme. It's high time for the Government of India to ratify the Basel Ban, and check the illegal imports of e-waste.

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*By Kishore K. Wankhade; Published by Toxics Link; 01/03/2004*

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