

EPA Chief Calls for Limiting Exports of e-Waste to Developing Countries

Especially those going under the guise of Re-use

EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson

E-Waste Meeting
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As prepared for delivery.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I understand this is the largest gathering of countries to date to discuss enforcement issues related to e-waste. I know this issue is very important to all of you in this room and I am so pleased that EPA could support your efforts by co-hosting this meeting.

I would especially like to thank Interpol and their Global E-Waste Crime Group for your continued efforts and partnership. I also want to thank the Environment Agency of England and Wales and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency for your continued support. And thank you to everyone for being a part of this conversation.

Last, before I begin, I want to thank Alex Lin, who you had the opportunity to hear from earlier today. I was with Alex just last week to present him and his friends at the Westerly Innovations Network in Rhode Island, with a President's Environmental Youth Award. The award was for Project TGIF, Turn Grease into Fuel. The group collected cooking oil and had it refined into biofuel to give to local charities. Thank you for the work you're doing in the area of e-waste as well. It gives me great hope to see young people like you become so involved in such important causes.

All of us here could take out our cell phones or Blackberries. We'll go back to our offices and sit at our computers. We might bring our iPods to the gym. Use our iPads or Kindles to read a book, or watch some TV tonight. In America and other developed countries, we're proud of our technology. It makes life simpler, helps us communicate better and adds convenience, relaxation and fun to our lives. Some like technology so much they'll wait - overnight - in lines for the newest gadget.

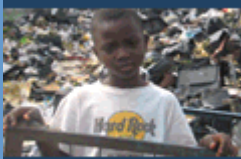
When the next best thing comes out, we - hopefully - all recycle the old...like my sons do. I can't tell you how many video games they go through in just a couple of years. But where do those video games, iPods, cell phones and computers go then?



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The Digital Dump



Most Americans can't answer that question. They trust that recycling our e-waste means it will be properly disposed. But in this room, we know the truth. Too often this e-waste ends up illegally overseas in developing countries - India, Africa - where labor is cheaper...and workers are often less safe. 50,000 metric tons of e-waste enters India illegally every year. About 500 loads of used electronics enter Nigeria each month. Misleading labels on shipments claim equipment is for "reuse" - which is how it is allowed to end up there - when really it's just junk.

Earlier this month I was planning on going to Africa to view one of these illegal dumping sites for myself. Unfortunately my plans changed because of the BP Oil Spill in the Gulf that required my immediate attention - as it continues to. But I don't need to go to Africa or China or India to know about the electronics that are discarded at open dumpsites. The copper wires burning in open-air incinerators. Or the acid used to strip gold and other metals for resale. I don't need to go there to know about the ash-blackened rivers or the toxic fumes polluting the air. And I don't need to go there to know that workers are getting sick, and so are their children. I know all this, and so do each of you.

This is a global concern, as this gathering shows. Those of you from exporting countries are working to control, limit and track exports of e-waste. Those of you from importing countries are trying to stop unwanted imports, while also managing a growing amount of used electronics within your own borders.

I understand a main focus of this gathering is to address e-waste through tightened enforcement. Enforcement is the right place to start, since all the laws and regulations in the world cannot do a thing without the proper enforcement.

Working together is fundamental to this cause. Without collaboration and strong, fair enforcement, those attempting to circumvent the laws will never be punished, and others may go down this path. But as we wait for the newest technology to come on the market, the rules behind our enforcement efforts are falling behind the times.

We need to make some changes to ensure safe management of our used electronics. This includes legislative fixes that will help limit harmful exports that are happening under the name of legitimate reuse, refurbishment and recycling - until a more enforceable framework can be enacted and implemented. These legislative fixes should make sure to include all relevant stakeholders in the discussion.

And through a combination of legislation and regulation we can create incentives to spur the design of better, safer electronics - stopping some of the problems before they begin; we can establish standards implemented. These legislative fixes should make sure to include all relevant stakeholders in the discussion.

And through a combination of legislation and regulation we can create incentives to spur the design of better, safer electronics - stopping some of the problems before they begin; we can establish standards and certification processes that will draw a bright line separating the safe from the unsafe; and we can take steps toward ratifying the Basel Convention.

We know that this problem is complex. There is no simple solution or easy fix. And while we need legislative and regulatory changes in the U.S. - including everything I just mentioned - we are going to need to do even more.

We can start within our own government. The US Government is a large consumer of electronics. We buy or dispose of more than 10,000 computers a week, according to our General Services Administration. We're already reusing or reselling some of this equipment, and donating some to schools at home and abroad, thus leading by example. But we must also work together to come up with more innovative problem-solving solutions. This gathering is an important step towards that goal.

We must also work together to collect the most accurate information on where e-waste goes, and what happens once it gets there, to provide a sound basis for future action. We can do this in part by working closely with those at the local level, hearing their experiences and sharing information.

We must coordinate closely with those in enforcement as well - port authorities and customs - and enhance inspection capability. And we must work with the private sector - industry leaders who can make a big impact on

Sony - to name a few. These industry leaders can use fewer toxins when making new electronics, and they can help collect electronics and repair them to be reused instead of unnecessarily thrown away.

While it poses serious challenges, the problem of e-waste also presents opportunities. Opportunities here in America and other developing countries to promote green jobs, spur innovation and jumpstart a responsible domestic recycling industry. Opportunities to partner with developing countries to create safe jobs, a healthy environment to raise a family, and better infrastructure and training programs - and to showcase the environmental and economic benefits of responsible reuse, recycling, and disposal. And there are opportunities to enhance global cooperation...improve national security and increase safe, legal commerce throughout the world.

It's time for us to stop making our trash someone else's problem and start taking responsibility and setting a good example. Good luck as you continue to find solutions to e-waste and rest assure that you have EPA's full support every step of the way. Thank you.

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