



bots live

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THE HEALTH RISKS

E-WASTE-CONNECTED health risks can result from direct contact with harmful materials such as lead, cadmium, chromium or brominated flame retardants.

They are also triggered by inhalation of toxic fumes, as well as from accumulation of chemicals in soil, water and food.

In addition to its hazardous components, being processed, e-waste can give rise to a number of toxic by-products likely to affect human health, according to the World Health Organisation.

E-waste rising

There are renewed calls for better recycling of hazardous rubbish, writes Harry Pettit

WASTE from discarded electronics such as mobile phones, laptops and refrigerators is piling up worldwide, the UN has warned.

A full 44.7 million tonnes of so-called e-waste was generated around the world in 2016, up eight per cent from two years earlier.

That's the equivalent of 4,500 Eiffel Towers, the UN report says, adding that the number was expected to swell

"significantly" over coming decades.

The UN has urged nations to improve the way they recycle the often hazardous rubbish, which can leak hazardous chemicals like lead and cadmium into soil, water and food and release toxic fumes.

By 2021, the world will likely be cluttered with 52.2 million tonnes of such waste, the report found.

Today, this consists mainly of fridges, washing machines and other domestic appliances, but also increasingly mobile

phones and computers.

At the same time, this waste, which can pose serious risks to human health and the environment, is rarely recycled or properly discarded, with most of it ending up at dumpsites or in incinerators, according to the report.

Only 20 per cent of all e-waste, or 8.9 tonnes, generated last year was documented as properly recycled.

The fate of a full 76 per cent of all e-waste around the globe is unknown.

The report comes from the UN's International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the UN University (UNU) and the International Solid Waste Association.

"E-waste management is an urgent issue in today's digitally dependent world, where use of electronic devices is ever increasing," said ITU chief Houlin Zhao.

There is also an economic argument for more recycling, according to the report.

The total value of all raw materials present in e-waste, including gold, is estimated to be worth around 55 billion euros (RM265 billion) — more than most countries' national economies.

The document added that a growing number of countries are adopting e-waste management policies.

Today, 66 per cent of the global population, living in 67 countries, is covered by such policies, up from just 44 per cent in 2014.

ITU's e-waste technical expert Vanessa Gray suggested that technology companies should consider the e-waste impact of constantly pushing out new versions of products.

There are "also things that we can avoid, for example cables... that [are] not compatible with different devices," she told reporters in Geneva.

Perhaps the most promising approach to reducing e-waste is a system where consumers no longer purchase devices, but instead only the services they provide, Ruediger Kuehr of UNU's Sustainable Cycles Programme said.

If companies retain ownership of devices and appliances, providing consumers with replacements when needed, they would have an incentive to properly collect and recycle them.

Improper disposal and storage of the equipment would then "substantially decrease, or ideally disappear," Kuehr added.



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