

# High-Tech Waste Strangling 3rd World

Jim Gomez and Rod McGuirk, Associated Press Writers

BALI, Indonesia (AP) — Sales of household electrical gadgets will boom across the developing world in the next decade, wreaking environmental havoc if there are no new strategies to deal with the discarded TVs, cell phones and computers, a U.N. report said Monday.

The environmental and health hazards posed by the globe's mounting electronic waste are particularly urgent in developing countries, which are already dumping grounds for rich nations' high-tech trash, the U.N. Environment Program study said.

Electronic waste is piling up around the world at a rate estimated at 40 million U.S. tons (36 million metric tons) a year, the report said, noting that data remain insufficient.

China produces 2.6 million U.S. tons (2.3 million metric tons) of electronic waste a year, second only to the United States with 3.3 million U.S. tons (3 million metric tons), it said.

UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said the globe was ill-prepared to deal with the explosion of electronic gadgets over the past decade.

"The world is now confronted with a massive wave of electronic waste that is going to come back and hit us, particularly for least-developed countries, that may become a dumping ground," Steiner told The Associated Press ahead of a UNEP executive meeting in Bali.

He said some Americans and Europeans have sent broken computers to African countries falsely declared as donations. The computers were dumped outside slums as toxic waste and became potential hazards to people, he said.

The report predicts that China's waste rate from old computers will quadruple from 2007 levels by 2020. Meanwhile, in India, waste from old refrigerators — which contain hazardous chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbon gases — could triple by 2020.

It said the fastest growth in electronic waste in recent years has been in communications devices such as cell phones, pagers and smart phones.

Most of the recycling of electronic waste in developing countries such as China and India is done by inefficient and unregulated backyard operators. The environmentally harmful practice of heating electronic circuit boards over coal-fired grills to leach out gold is widespread in both countries.

The report called for regulations for collecting and managing electronic waste, and

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urged that technologies be transferred to the industrializing world to cope with such waste.

While electrical products such refrigerators, air conditioners, printers, DVD players and digital music players account for only a small part of the world's garbage, their components make them particularly hazardous.

Prof. Eric Williams, an Arizona State University expert on industrial ecology who did not participate in the UNEP study, said it was difficult to comment on the credibility of the electronic waste growth forecasts because the report gives little explanation of how they were calculated.

"It is the environmental intensity of e-waste rather than its total mass that is the main concern," Williams told the AP via e-mail.

"If e-waste is recycled informally in the developing world, it causes far worse pollution than the much larger mass of regular waste in landfills," he said.

*McGuirk contributed from Jakarta, Indonesia.*

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