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Recyclers Unaware of Risks

By Maneesh Pandey
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NEW DELHI -- Delhi is fast emerging as a dump yard for e-wastes from around the world. Says Ravi Agarwal of NGO Toxics Link: "Delhi and surrounding areas have a big market for recycled e-waste. Be it burning of PVC coated copper wires, gold extraction from computer chips, reuse of glass, plastic or taking out lead from picture tubes; there is a ready market in north India. Each picture tube of a dismantled PC yields four to 5 kg of lead," Agarwal said.

The recyclers are not fully aware of the health risks. "These products have components that contain toxic substances like lead, cadmium, mercury, hexavalent chromium, plastic, PVC, BFRs, barium, beryllium, and carcinogens like carbon black and heavy metals. This deadly mix can cause severe health problems in those handling the waste," says Agarwal.

Printed circuit boards, for instance, contain heavy metals like antimony, gold, silver, chromium, zinc, lead, tin and copper. The method of extracting these materials from circuit boards is highly hazardous and involves heating the metals in the open.

And, it seems the entire city is engaged in the business. Apart from at least 20 localities in the capital where recycling is done, Faridabad and Noida too have many such units. The industry at the moment is almost totally unregulated.

Says Agarwal, "The recycling being done is far from the ideal way of doing it. Proper recycling requires more facilities and huge investments. All that will require the manufacturing industries to chip in with some effort."

Adds Amit Jain of IRG Systems: "Globally, recycling happens in the organized sector. India has to find its own solutions for disposal of e-waste. This may include bringing in the unorganized sector into organized e-waste trade value chain. The manufacturing industry has to provide adequate recycling infrastructure."



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