

'Catastrophic' e-waste fuels global toxic dump

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A Greenpeace activist stands on a truck carrying an installation made from hazardous e-waste during a protest in New Delhi in 2007. A "catastrophic accumulation" of dozens of millions of tonnes of "e-waste" from computers, cellphones and television sets is fuelling a global pile of hazardous waste, an international body has warned.

A "catastrophic accumulation" of dozens of millions of tonnes of "e-waste" from computers, cellphones and television sets is fuelling a global pile of hazardous waste, an international body warned Friday.

Figures due to be released in the coming weeks by the Basel Convention on transboundary movement of hazardous waste will show that the

amount of discarded [electronic goods](#) has grown exponentially in recent years, officials said.

The convention's office said the stockpile, which includes toxic heavy metals and hazardous chemicals, needed to be tackled swiftly.

"I'd say it's something in the region of six billion tonnes, it's a rough estimate," said Katharina Kummer Peiry, executive secretary of the international agreement, which was signed in 1989.

"E-waste did not even exist as a waste stream in 1989 and now it's one of the largest and growing exponentially," she told journalists.

A report by experts for the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) estimated that the flow would soon reach 50 million tonnes a year.

The Basel Convention underlined that e-waste was a by-product of the business and consumer boom in electronic communications.

"Add an increasing demand for electronic gaming, higher definition televisions or smart cars, and the result is a catastrophic accumulation of e-waste, now and into the future," it added in a statement.

Extracts of data released on Friday showed that transboundary movements of overall hazardous waste grew by about a fifth from 9.35 million tonnes in 2005 to 11.25 million tonnes in 2006.

Some 172 countries have signed up to the Basel Convention, which regulates international movements of hazardous and toxic wastes, amongst others by ensuring that shipments are approved by the receiving country.

Apart from preventing developing countries being used as dumps for

toxic waste from industrialised nations, the convention also hoped to stem all cross border movement of waste in order to encourage nations to dispose of their own.

But movements have grown this decade, as has the number of countries trading waste.

Officials also admit there is still substantial illicit trade that is not accounted for.

Several nations on Friday highlighted the issue of e-waste ahead of the 20th anniversary celebrations for the Basel Convention on November 17.

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