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New UN agreement seeks to protect environment from hazardous electronic waste



Considering electronic waste: the view inside a bustling electronics market in Bangkok, Thailand. UN Photo/Kibae Park

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A new United Nations agreement seeks to diminish the damage caused by electronic waste through the collection and recycling of hazardous materials, as well as by introducing measures to improve the ways in which this equipment is managed.

According to the UN International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)), electronic waste is expected to grow exponentially, particularly in developing countries, yet only 13 per cent of electronic waste is recycled, many times without safety procedures in place.

The agreement, which was signed between the ITU and the Secretariat of the Basel Convention (SBC), intends to strengthen collaboration between information and communications technology (ICT) and environmental policymakers to address this issue.

“The ICT sector is already making significant progress in improving its environmental performance and reducing e-waste through improved best practices and standards,” [said](#) ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré.

“The collaboration with the Secretariat of the Basel Convention will allow the global community to address this ever-increasing problem through a holistic approach, involving the recycling industry as well as environmental policy makers.”

Electronic waste, which contains toxic materials used in the manufacturing process, can cause widespread damage to the environment and human health. Through the agreement, which was signed yesterday, ITU and SBC will exchange information and practices and will work on joint projects and programmes to set ICT standards and raise awareness among countries about electronic waste management.

“ICT equipment has to be dealt with in view of its entire life-cycle, and this includes the time when the equipment comes to its end-of-life and becomes e-waste,” said Jim Willis, Executive Secretary of the Basel Convention.

“Collaboration between ITU and SBC will further our shared objectives in support of sustainable development that essentially includes environmentally sound management of waste.”

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