

OLD MOBILE PHONES ARE FOUND TO BE TOXIC WASTE

Basel Convention asked to Act to Prevent Impacts on Developing Countries

Basel Action Network (BAN) Press Release

Geneva, 27 April 2004. Two independent studies funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the State of California respectively, reveal that obsolete or non-working mobile phones qualify as hazardous waste even with their batteries removed. The toxicity is due to the use of the toxic metal lead in the phones and their propensity to leach the lead content when deposited in a municipal landfill. The Basel Action Network (BAN), a global toxic trade watchdog, made the investigation into emerging toxicity data and released it in a short report, after the Basel Convention mobile phones corporate partnership program indicated it would refuse to address the question.

The issue is of significance due to the fact that mobile phone use is experiencing unprecedented growth in consumption worldwide. This fact combined with their rapid obsolescence has created a mobile phone waste deluge. The revelations that this new flood of waste mobile phones is actually a flood of *toxic* waste that can threaten groundwater resources around the world, or the lives of recyclers in developing countries is, according to BAN, an issue that must be addressed immediately.

“Mobile phones that have us addicted by their convenience while in hand, are, once discarded, soon transformed into a very inconvenient societal burden of poison and disease,” said Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network. *“The implications for exportation of these old mobile phones to developing countries for recycling or re-use can equate to an immediate or delayed toxic time bomb.”*

Two years ago, BAN, released a groundbreaking report “Exporting Harm: The High-Tech Trashing of Asia” that revealed that 80% of electronic wastes collected for recycling were actually exported to countries like Pakistan, India and China where they were subjected to primitive and highly polluting recycling operations which contaminated Asian communities and impacted the health of workers. They fear that already, mobile phone waste is on the move from rich to poor countries.

BAN released the report at the Open Ended Working Group of the Basel Convention being held in Geneva this week. At the meeting, delegates from Colombia, Nigeria, Brazil, Botswana, Uganda, Namibia and Kenya all took the floor to express alarm and concern over the dramatic quantities of cell phones now impacting their countries once discarded.

Movements of hazardous wastes of all kinds are meant to be defined, and controlled or prohibited under the terms of the Basel Convention – an international treaty under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme. While the Basel Convention has launched the Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative, with the top 10 manufacturers of mobile phones, that program has made a decision to ignore the legal implications of the Basel Convention with respect to mobile phones.

BAN received an explanation from the mobile phone working group, claiming that examining whether mobile phone waste is toxic and therefore to be controlled under the Basel Convention is “outside the mandate” of the committee whose mandate is “Best Practice Guidelines for Collection Schemes and Transboundary Movement of used phones.”

“Remarkably, the one treaty charged with controlling the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes has abdicated its responsibility to take steps to manage this potential new tidal wave of toxic waste,” said Puckett. *“The Convention appears to be willing to put its head in the sand in order to placate industry ,”* he said.

For more information:

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Report “Mobile Toxic Waste” is available at: <http://www.ban.org/Library/mobilephonetoxicityrep.pdf>

In the United States alone, experts estimate that 130 million cell phones will be discarded by the year 2005, resulting in 65,000 tons of cell phone waste.