



WASTE AND POVERTY

Urbanisation is increasing at a high rate in developing countries. At the moment 1 billion people worldwide live in slums associated with urbanisation. Population increase in urban centres raises the pressures on urban infrastructures. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) management is very often one of the last issues being addressed (wastewater treatment and air pollution are most often dealt with first). International waste trade is increasing, part due to globalisation, and less developed countries are very often at the receiving end of waste produced in wealthier countries. Additionally, waste problems are intensified due to economic growth, with resulting growth in MSW, within these countries themselves.

In many cities in Africa and India less than half the MSW generated is collected. Worldwide over two thirds of human waste is released into the environment with little or no treatment. The most common disposal method in developing countries is an open dump.

MSW is not just a problem in cities, rural areas very often lack any form of waste collection. But there are still high waste productions in these areas; Mining and agriculture the most obvious generating sectors. It is estimated that 26kg of waste is generated per 1 kg of food produced – waste is very often dumped on vacant lands, in bodies of water and/or burned.

Hazards associated with open dumps:

- **Methane – explosion risks**
- **Strong leachates – contaminating soil and waters**
- **Fires in uncontrolled dumps (but even controlled ones too) – often start spontaneously caused by heat and methane, produced through biodegrading of waste – hazardous toxic fumes.**
- **attraction of vermin, flies and birds – spreading of diseases to humans**
- **Future land use in jeopardy due to unknown materials on site.**

Additionally, mining waste is frequently dumped on vacant lands also, destroying valuable habitats and may pollute waters also.

Electronic Waste

Producer responsibility...Do you know where your electronic waste ends up?

Electronic waste is classed as hazardous waste and it accounts for >70% of all toxic waste found in landfill sites. Electronic waste contains valuable metals like eg aluminium and copper, but it also

contains hazardous materials such as lead, mercury and cadmium. These metals can contaminate our waters even in small amounts if placed in landfill sites.

Electronic waste is one of the fastest growing waste streams in the world, not only in the developed world but also in less developed countries. Even though there are strict controls about the movement of e-waste, in particular to less developed countries, it is estimated that 90% of our 'waste' computers is transported to countries such as China, India, Ghana and Pakistan for the purpose of recycling. However very often these computers end up in either landfill in these countries or are recycled in unofficial junk yards with little or no concern for the environment and human health.

As with a lot of our other waste, electrical and electronic equipment should not be considered waste but looked upon as a very valuable resource.

Aluminium recovered from Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment (WEEE) uses 95% less energy than if we make aluminium from raw ore, it also uses 97% less water when recycled.

Better still, re use of electronic waste! If you send your WEEE to reputable waste collectors all the data will be wiped off and the equipment will then be sent to local, reputable, charities

It is very important we know what happens to our waste and we have the responsibility to ensure it is not dumped in less developed countries that might have less stringent policies, guidelines, and laws when it comes to environmental problems!

Information for this piece gathered from www.un.org and www.wider.unu.edu WP23/2010