Safely Handling Electronic Waste Stats and Facts



FACTS

1. Electronic waste (e-waste) recycling workers in low and middle-income countries have the potential for occupational injuries due to the nature of their work at informal e-waste sites.
2. Many devices are thrown away at the end of their useful life (the average useful life varies by device; however the average phone is replaced every 18 months) or in favor of the newest upgrade or model.
3. A considerable amount of e-waste is landfilled, sent to scrap yards, or paid to be warehoused. For richer countries, unwanted electronics are exported to poorer countries, where lack of infrastructure to handle them often means illegally dumping or burning the waste.
4. A shortage of semiconductor chips is hurting manufacturing, while experts predict that the production of electric cars will stall if recycling for lithium-ion batteries does not improve.
5. In recycling facilities, items with embedded batteries can spark fires. And when disposed of in landfill, these hazardous materials eventually leach into the environment, polluting air, soil, and water—as well as impacting the livelihood of people living near landfills throughout the world.

STATS

- 20% of electronic waste is collected and recycled, and the destination of the rest is unknown. It is estimated that only 41 countries compile statistics on the problem.
- According to the UN, in 2021 each person on the planet will produce on average 7.6 kg of e-waste, meaning that a massive 57.4 million tons will be generated worldwide. Only 17.4% of this electronic waste, containing a mixture of harmful substances and precious materials, will be recorded as being properly collected, treated and recycled.
- Many discarded devices contain prized raw materials, including gold, copper, palladium, and other metals that could be used in other devices. An estimated $21 billion (or more) of reclaimable gold and silver are currently sitting in landfills across the world, stuck in electronics.
- In 2019, the annual accumulation of global e-waste reached a whopping 59 million tons. And of that amount, only 17.4% was collected and recycled. Furthermore, in a five-year period leading up to 2019, total generation of e-waste grew 21%, leading researchers to suggest that the amount of e-waste could double in the next 16 years.

- According to the Global E-waste Monitor 2020, the world generated 53.6 Mt of e-waste in 2019, only 9.3 Mt (17%) of which was recorded as being collected and recycled.
- Recycling rates globally are low. Even in the EU, which leads the world in e-waste recycling, just 35% of e-waste is officially reported as properly collected and recycled. Globally, the average is 20%; the remaining 80% is undocumented, with much ending up buried under the ground for centuries as landfill.