

Electronic waste can threaten ecology



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Prashanti Tiwari 8 September 2013 7003 views

Assam has not been able to successfully cope well with its municipal solid waste management methodologies wherein E-waste management has crept up as a new kid on the block. Unscientific disposal of electronic waste can harm the eco-system. With the ever growing number of unorganized scrap dealing in nexus with the government, electronic waste management can blow out of proportion when scrap dealers go an extra mile to become E-waste recyclers.

To address the situation six Pollution Control Boards in North East India came together for the first time to discuss and chart out a future roadmap for sound management of electronic waste in the region. In a workshop organized by Toxics Link, 'E Waste- Creating Changes', recently, the State Pollution Control Boards of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland expressed grave concern on the status of E-waste management in their states and decided to take initiatives to tackle with this problem.

According to the officials of State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) present in the workshop, the major concern in the North East is that this toxic waste is largely being collected by the scrap dealers, mixed with municipal waste and dumped in the landfills, to be burned openly or leach out and contaminate the soil, water and air. The authorities identified lack of mass awareness as one of the key bottlenecks which needs to be addressed immediately. The civil society organizations present in the meeting also spoke about increasing volumes of this waste and the need to integrate the existing informal sector.

The Ministry of Environment and Forest notified the E-waste (Management and Handling) Rules, in 2011, which came into effect from May 1, 2012. Satish Sinha, Associate Director Toxics Link stated that 'Even after one year of rules, there has been no change on ground in the region. It is not only domestic generation but huge inflow of imported substandard, electronics from countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and China, that is largely mauling the region'.

E-waste concerns are crucial not just because of the volumes of obsolete products generated but because of the presence of toxics material like Lead, Mercury, Brominated Flame Retardants and others. With complete lack of awareness and large usage of electronics, this toxic waste stream has the potential to damage the fragile environment of the region. Absence of any collection, dismantling and recycling centers adds to the bleak scenario.

The recommendations emerging from the workshop spelt out some key tasks to be taken up by SPCBs in next few months for safe e-waste management in the region, which included state wise assessment of E-waste, implementing Extended Producer Responsibility and mass awareness. A joint forum was also formed to continue the dialogue among the stakeholders, which will take forward the recommendations.

According to CPCB Officials, Toxics Link initiatives have educated the North East Pollution Control Boards about the Indian scenario with respect to the management of E-Waste and for immediate action for quantification of E-waste generation in the region.

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