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Solar and Wind Power Waste: The elephant in the green energy room



A picture made available on June 20, 2016, shows a silhouette of a man in front of wind turbines in Taichung, Taiwan, on June 19, 2016. EPA/RITCHIE B TONGO

By BR Reporter | Published Jan 18, 2023

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Though solar and wind power are sources of so-called “green energy”, this does not mean that it has no impact on the environment.

“On the contrary, very large amounts of waste need to be disposed of when solar panels and wind turbines reach their end life.” warns Patricia Schroder, the



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Schroder says steps have to be taken right away to avert future disasters.

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“According to research by the International Renewable Energy Agency, South Africa will have accumulated between 750 000 and one million tons of PV waste by 2050. The researchers correctly point out that, if badly designed and managed, this could cause significant environmental harm.”

Photovoltaic panels and wind turbines are tough to break down and can't be readily recycled.

“Modern Solar PV units contain several toxins and metals, like lead and cadmium, that are exceedingly dangerous for both the environment and human health. When used solar panels are dumped in landfills, such materials swiftly flow down into groundwater.”

Schroder adds that South Africa does, in fact, have the necessary recycling capacity, however, for this to succeed, waste volumes must be diverted to PRO-accredited service providers to be legally managed in an environmentally sound manner. Furthermore, industry support and buy-in to the take-back systems will change the status of an alarmingly low compliance rate to the EPR Regulations of these industries.

“The... is... the... of... PV... and... the... level... ”



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"This includes enhancing our waste management systems, making public investments in recycling infrastructure, and providing incentives for the private sector and Eskom to increase its capacity for recycling."

How can producers identify legitimate service providers?

Schroder says the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has useful guidelines that state the obligations of PRO's, and their waste management schemes.

"They must develop a system to collect the EPR fees, maintain a register of its members and conduct internal and external financial audits and submit to the department," she notes.

Furthermore, legitimate service providers should upload an External Audit Report to the SA Waste Information Centre for public access; collect, record, manage and submit data to the South African Waste Information System and finally liaise with the downstream value chain for services to ensure that the contracting process is fair and transparent.

"When all role players work together, green energy systems can cause as little harm as possible to the environment during its complete life cycle – not just whilst it generates electricity," Schroder says.

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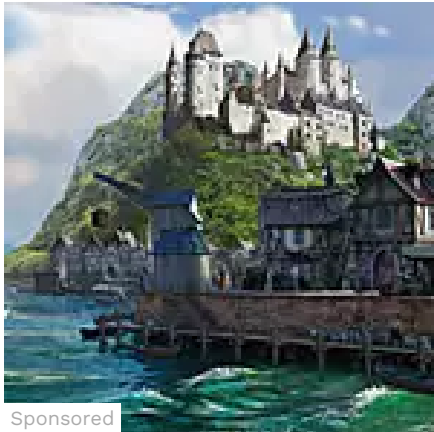


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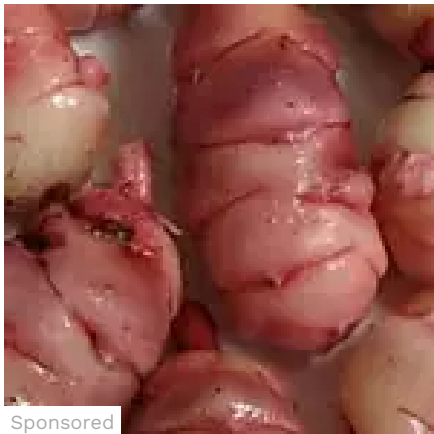
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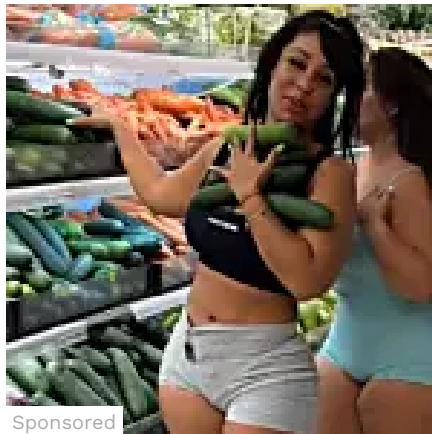
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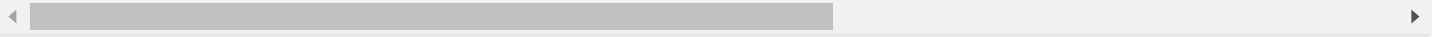
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