

The effect of EPR regulations on the recycling infrastructure

By **Patricia Schröder** - 21st Nov 2022



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The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Regulations which came into effect in May 2021, aims to ensure that producers are accountable for the entire life cycle of the products they place on the market, from conception to post-consumer waste disposal. Its influence will extend well beyond the producers.

The regulations can impact – and in fact benefit – many of the different waste management and

recycling service providers

Waste management and recycling service providers can furthermore be divided into 'informal' and 'formal' sectors. The former include waste pickers; private shop owners and private repair service providers. The latter comprises waste operators (both public and private); retail group executives; franchisees; organised bodies representing the implementing agents; and landfill operators.

Impact and opportunities for informal sector

Although informal waste collectors worry that PRO's take-back programs may jeopardise their ability to make a living from collection for recycling, they still play a valuable role in the waste industry.

It is crucial that waste pickers be taken into account moving ahead. Potential exploitation of their informal sector is of special concern to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE). As such they have proposed measures to try and address this, including ensuring fair remuneration for the services informal waste pickers offer.

All informal waste collectors, reclaimers and pickers are urged to register with the National Waste Picker Registration Database for collection services. They can find out more from their respective representative associations.

Private shop owners can benefit by creating their own 'take-back programmes' for customers.

For instance, customers are frequently relieved when retailers indicate they can assist with recycling their old devices. Returning these objects to a location where they will be responsibly and lawfully disposed of is a satisfying alternative. Take-back programs managed by a PRO help retailers earn extra cash by recycling or processing this e-waste.



Impact and opportunities for formal sector

Retailers and franchisees can partner with a PRO to enable them to fulfil their recycling and EPR mandates. This is all done while enabling the company to fund other EPR scheme components, including mentoring and training programs, enterprise development, and equipment and infrastructure assistance.

Waste management operators – responsible for the collection, management, and recycling of packaging – can also benefit. They are eligible to receive funds from EPR schemes for handling packaging waste.

In terms of landfills, she says the EPR Regulations and take-back schemes will also lighten their load.

Although South Africa lacks official information on its landfill space, those in the waste management sector concur that the nation is on the edge of a crisis. By making the manufacturers financially and/or operationally accountable for their products at end-of-life, more waste will be kept out of landfills.

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