

ENVIRONMENT

Electronic waste dumping a global concern

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THE UN Office on Drugs and Crime says electronic waste (e-waste) is the fastest-growing waste stream in the world.

It says the waste covers a host of electronic items, such as personal computers, televisions, mobile phones, and printers, as well as electrical goods such as refrigerators and air-conditioning units.

“Globally, the United Nations Environment Programme (Unep) estimates that up to 50 million tons of e-waste is generated every year, with only 10% of it being recycled,” it said.

Patricia Schröder, spokesperson for Circular Energy, a Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)-registered producer responsibility organisation for waste from electrical and electronic equipment organisations, said illegal e-waste dumping had far-reaching implications.

Schröder said it posed a threat to the health of communities.

“It also contaminates soil, water, and air. To deal with this threat, fast action is required. For instance, the government and businesses can work together to close regulatory gaps and impose severe fines on those responsible for illicit e-waste dumping. This will send a clear message that these actions will not be tolerated,” said Schröder.

She said that consumer behaviour also played a pivotal role in combating the issue.

“By disposing of our electrical and electronic products responsibly, we can

create a shift towards responsible recycling and discourage illegal dumping,” said Schröder.

To facilitate responsible disposal, Circular Energy has partnered with Woolworths to establish drop-off points across the country, with containers for small portable batteries and household lamps.

“This initiative aims to make it easier for consumers to dispose of these items properly,” said Schröder.

She said that by using these drop-off points, consumers could contribute to responsible waste management and help prevent the escalation of illegal e-waste dumping.

“This service empowers consumers to be part of the solution without compromising convenience. For instance, we recently received a call from a concerned citizen informing us of illegally dumped fluorescent tubes in a roadside rubbish bin in Gauteng. Our team responded swiftly to remove these tubes and recycle them in a responsible manner,” she said.

Schröder said manufacturers needed to take accountability for the life cycle of their products and promote responsible manufacturing, usage, and disposal.

The DFFE said the extended producer responsibility (EPR) regulations came into effect in November 2021 with EPR notices for electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) and lighting equipment.

It said the EPR notice for EEE sets out specific mandatory take-back measures to be implemented for electronic products and subsequent waste.

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