

COUNTERING WEEE ILLEGAL TRADE PROJECT

2013-2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research undertaken by the Countering WEEE Illegal Trade (CWIT) project found that in Europe, only 35% (3.3 million tons) of all the e-waste discarded in 2012, ended up in the officially reported amounts of collection and recycling systems.

The other 65% (6.15 million tons) was either:

- recycled under non-compliant conditions in Europe (3.15 million tons),
- exported (1.5 million tons),
- scavenged for valuable parts (0.75 million tons)
- or simply thrown in waste bins (0.75 million tons).

1.3 million tons departed the EU in undocumented exports. These shipments are likely to be classified as illegal, where they do not adhere to the guidelines for differentiating used equipment from waste, such as the appropriate packaging of the items. Since the main economic driver behind these shipments is reuse and repair and not the dumping of e-waste; of this volume, an estimated 30% is e-waste. This finding matches extrapolated data from IMPEL on export ban violations, indicating 0.25 million tons as a minimum and 0.7 million tons as a maximum of illegal e-waste shipments.

Interestingly, some ten times that amount (4.65 million tons) is wrongfully mismanaged or illegally traded within Europe itself. The widespread scavenging of both products and components and the theft of valuable components such as circuit boards and precious metals from e-waste, means that there is a serious economic loss of materials and resources directed to compliant e-waste processors in Europe.

Better guidelines and formal definitions are required to help authorities distinguish used, non-waste electronic and electrical equipment (such as equipment coming out of use or in post-use storage destined for collection or disposal) from WEEE. Penalties must be harmonised to simplify enforcement in trans-border cases.

Organised crime is involved in illegal waste supply chains in some Member States.

However, suspicions of the involvement of organised crime in WEEE are not corroborated by current information. Increased intelligence will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Importantly, case analysis of illegal activities outlines that vulnerabilities exist throughout the entire WEEE supply chain (e.g. collection, consolidation, brokering, transport, and treatment). Offences include: inappropriate treatment, violations of WEEE trade regulations, theft, lack of required licenses/permits, smuggling, and false load declarations.

To address vulnerabilities more coherent multi-stakeholder cooperation is essential. For this purpose, a recommendation roadmap with short, medium, and long term recommendations has been developed.

These recommendations aim to reduce illegal trade through specific actions for individual stakeholders; to improve national and international cooperation to combat illegal WEEE trade, actions such as:

- Increasing involvement, and improving awareness of users in the early stages of the e-waste chain;
- An EU-wide ban on cash transactions in the scrap metal trade;
- Mandatory treatment of WEEE in accordance with approved standards, and dedicated mandatory reporting of treatment and de-pollution results;
- Better targeting, more upstream inspection, and national monitoring;
- An Operational Intelligence Management System (OIMS) to support intelligence-led enforcement and identify the risks associated with organised crime groups;
- A National Environmental Security Task Force (NEST), formed by different authorities and partners, to enable a law enforcement response that is collaborative and coordinated at national, regional, and international level; and
- Dedicated training of judges and prosecutors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	🕒 1 - 3 YEARS	🕒 3 - 5 YEARS	🕒 > 5 YEARS
ACTOR RESPONSIBILITY	Consumers, PRO's Collection points Producers, Recyclers, LEA's, Policy markers	Producers, Recyclers, Policy makers LEA's, NGO's, Internat'l organizations	LEA's, Prosecutors, Judges
PRIORITIZATION & TIMING	1.2 Improve collection 1.3 National WEEE monitoring 2.3 National WEEE monitoring	1.4 All actors report 2.4 Smarter inspections 4.3 Internat'l WEEE networks	4.4 Enhanced prosecution & sentencing
SUPPORT MEASURES	1.1 Educate consumers 2.1 Improve treatment 2.2 Improve reuse		
SUPPORT POLICIES	3.1 Waste codifications 3.2 Consistent guidelines 3.4 Harmonize penalties		
LEA INFRASTRUCTURE	3.3 Train authorities 4.2 LEA capacity building 4.1 Information management system		

More details can be found in Deliverable 6.1 Recommendations related to the EU Legal Framework, Deliverable 6.2 Recommendations for law enforcement organisations, Deliverable 6.3 Recommendations for the WEEE treatment industry, Deliverable 6.4 Recommendations for the electronics industry.