

“Importance of recycling of e-waste”

Globally, 50 million tons of e-waste is generated annually and has all ‘potential’ to grow at much faster rate than any other waste streams. It is very interesting to note that even after the due use, this particular ‘waste’ is of great significance & value. Generally speaking, e-waste consists of more than 92% recoverable and reusable commodities, some of them are highly precious and limited and in terms of absolute numbers, 50 million tons of e-waste consists of 15 million tons of steel (more than annual production of SAIL), 4 million tons of aluminum, 6 million tons of copper over & above glass, plastic, silver, gold, palladium, platinum, iridium etc. In spite of so resource rich, 80% of e-scrap goes in land fill because of high recycling costs in developed nations. And, the developing nations, where recycling is a natural phenomenon, unfortunately do not deploy environment friendly practices. Effectively, both the sets of countries are equally harming the environment and polluting air, water & soil and finally we breathe in polluted air, drink contaminated water and eat grains, vegetables, fruits, fishes etc with several toxics.

To reproduce the above commodities, we need to go deeper in to the mines and excavate in multiples to produce required quantities of respective commodities, invest in infrastructure, use billion of units of electricity, millions of man years, generate carbon foot print and meet in Copenhagen to resolve. The above certainly justifies that end of life electrical & electronic equipments are really “Resource” and by recycling we can save lots of other inputs which may be used elsewhere for other socio economic developments.

It is evident that demand of such gadgets will continue to increase because of change in technology, status & style. Besides the incremental demand for obvious reasons, computing & communication are the barometers of socio-economic change. And therefore, I strongly believe that we should not bother about the increase in the quantum of e-waste, what we should really focus on the method of collection till disposal of hazardous substances and needless to say that these facilities should be completely environment friendly so that we need not to meet either in Basel or Copenhagen for such negative and non productive kind of objectives.

Man made products have certain life cycle and at the same time natural resources are not in proportion to our need & greed, therefore we must realize that recycling is a parallel industry and we must act faster. It becomes more important if we look at the several other indirect benefits over & above cleaner & greener environment because of proper recycling, better health less hospitals, better productivity lesser price, significantly less investment in recycling facilities in comparison to the infrastructure industries to reproduce same commodities, less mining less imbalance to the equilibrium so on and so forth.

At the same time, there are certain challenges, which are equally important to note, a few of them are:

1. Reverse Logistics
2. Returns
3. Responsibility

Post sales the products gets spread over nationally (considering local sales only), to collect back used material from door to door is not that commercially viable & feasible as in the beginning, look at the used mobile phones or used water bottle. Therefore, it is very essential that responsible reverse logistic system is made mandatory for each & every generator of the discarded equipments to drop or get transported the e-waste at the designated collection

points. Ecoreco has developed a network of collection for its more than 250 corporate entities across India and their several offices. Similar model can be put in to place for the individuals also provided they get together and accumulate inventory at one location, like wise educational institutions can allow students and their families to bring their e-waste on certain intervals and inform to Ecoreco to collect.

Another major challenge in India is that majority of the generators of e-waste expects huge returns and also expect the recyclers must take away from their door steps & process at their costs & expenses , barring a few, who loves safer environment. This attitude gives birth to unorganized dismantler, who does not care for the environment and openly burn or dilute several items in acids/other hazardous chemicals to recover metals besides many other polluting methods. A paradigm shift is required in the approach to give priority to environment above financial gains.

Third major challenge relates to the responsibility, there is no specific provision under the law which makes it mandatory for the manufacturer to take back after use and to the consumers cash returns are more important, in such circumstance it is difficult for the recyclers to get the e-waste for environment friendly recycling, until & unless there is a regulatory pressure.

I wish to finally submit that for the sustainable & viable development, we have to change our attitude towards environment and should not wait for the nature to react.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The time has come to focus on recycling of the used material / equipments to meet socio - economic growth rather than going deeper into the mines and disturbing the ecological balance.
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