# Global summit in Geneva aims to tackle soaring electronic waste crisis



More than 180 countries have convened in Geneva to address the escalating global crisis of electronic waste, which continues to surge to unprecedented levels. The international talks, held under the Basel Convention and running from 22 April to 9 May 2024, aim to regulate the disposal and movement of hazardous waste, also addressing chemical pollution under the Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.

Electronic waste, or e-waste, encompasses a wide range of discarded electronic devices, from broken phones and laptops to old refrigerators and medical equipment. According to the United Nations Global E-waste Monitor, the world generated roughly 62 million tonnes of e-waste in 2022 – enough to form a convoy of trucks circling the equator – and this quantity is projected to increase to 82 million tonnes by 2030. Despite the sheer volume, only about 22 percent of this waste is properly recycled, with the remainder often dumped or incinerated, releasing hazardous toxins into the environment.

Africa, in particular, is disproportionately affected by the problem. A significant portion of the continent's e-waste originates from shipments masquerading as second-hand goods, despite many items being broken or near the end of their usable life. These shipments have been prohibited since the Basel Convention came into effect in 1992, yet due to loopholes and insufficient enforcement, they persist. Informal recycling operations in Africa frequently use unsafe methods such as open burning and acid baths, which release toxic chemicals into the soil, water, and air.

Edem d'Almeida, founder of Africa Global Recycling based in Togo, highlighted the ongoing challenges in an interview with RFI. He remarked, "Many Western countries continue to export hazardous waste by presenting defective equipment as second-hand appliances." He further underscored that the volume of waste in Africa is "largely underestimated" because much of it travels through informal channels. D'Almeida emphasised the responsibility of states to monitor imported materials to prevent Africa from becoming a global dumping ground.

The human health impact of e-waste disposal is especially severe for vulnerable groups. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that children and pregnant women are particularly at risk. Burning, dismantling, or soaking e-waste in acid baths can release substances such as lead, mercury, and dioxins that damage the brain, lungs, and nervous system. A 2021 WHO report noted that e-waste recycling activities could emit up to 1,000 different chemical substances and that children involved directly in dismantling are exposed to serious health risks.

Environmental consequences extend beyond human health, with contaminated water sources, polluted soil, and threats to food security also being critical concerns. Oleg Zaitsev, who heads an e-waste recycling firm in Kazakhstan working with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), explained that hazardous materials in electronic scrap threaten ecosystems and agricultural productivity.

At the Geneva talks, delegates are also debating restrictions on persistent chemicals under the Stockholm Convention, including PFAS — often referred to as “forever chemicals” found in various products such as food packaging and cosmetics. Giulia Carlini, a lawyer at the Centre for International Environmental Law (CIEL), participating as an observer in the negotiations, described listing PFAS as "a useful first step" but cautioned that "what's really needed is full prohibition." The Geneva discussions come ahead of negotiations on a global plastics treaty, presenting an opportunity to address interlinked waste issues comprehensively. However, progress could be impeded by the convention’s rules that grant each country an effective veto and by lobbying from industry groups.

Several African nations are implementing measures to mitigate the e-waste challenge. Nigeria has introduced a system requiring electronics importers and manufacturers to contribute to recycling costs, Ghana has levied taxes on imports of used and end-of-life electronics, and Rwanda has engaged private companies to establish a national e-waste recycling centre. Despite these efforts, formal recycling currently accounts for less than 1 percent of Africa's e-waste.

UN experts estimate that if global e-waste collection and recycling reached 60 percent by 2030, the economic benefits could exceed costs by more than $38 billion, through improvements in public health, ecosystem preservation, and job creation.

Jacqueline Alvarez, UNEP’s head of chemicals and health, summarised the situation, noting, "Chemicals are an integral part of the modern world. But too often, exposure to harmful chemicals through food, consumer products, and the environment can have severe consequences for people and the planet."

The RFI is reporting on these developments, highlighting the growing international efforts to contain the mounting e-waste crisis and its wide-ranging impacts.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.basel.int/Implementation/PublicAwareness/Allactivities/tabid/7934/lapg-44400/1/Default.aspx> - This page provides information about the Basel Convention's activities, including the 16th meeting of the Implementation and Compliance Committee, which is scheduled to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 28 April to 5 May 2025. This aligns with the article's mention of international talks in Geneva under the Basel Convention from 22 April to 9 May 2024.
* <https://www.basel.int/Implementation/PublicAwareness/Allactivities/tabid/7934/lapg-44400/28/Default.aspx> - This page discusses the Basel Convention Open-ended Working Group's review of the framework for the environmental sound management of wastes, including electronic waste. The meeting took place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 25 to 28 June 2024, which is relevant to the article's mention of international talks in Geneva under the Basel Convention.
* <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Environment/Pages/Publications/The-Global-E-waste-Monitor-2024.aspx> - This publication provides the latest data on global e-waste, including the generation of 62 million tonnes in 2022 and projections to reach 82 million tonnes by 2030. It also highlights that only 22.3% of e-waste was formally collected and recycled in 2022, supporting the article's statistics on e-waste generation and recycling rates.
* <https://www.basel.int/Implementation/PublicAwareness/Allactivities/tabid/7934/lapg-44400/1/Default.aspx> - This page details the Basel Convention's activities, including the 16th meeting of the Implementation and Compliance Committee, scheduled to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 28 April to 5 May 2025. This aligns with the article's mention of international talks in Geneva under the Basel Convention from 22 April to 9 May 2024.
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* <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMirwFBVV95cUxONS1wazBvQlBrT0tZWkxPRE1UcENYRHRhMXlCMDNKOEYyTnBSQUJpdy1wTWRmYVJNMWRTMTQ2UjZSWDBjcEpQc0NZcWJ3d1lBN3F5TnhuS29fVXcwQklhYXNNZThjVWpYLXlNNlRPb1ltVWJyOTZQSUVyLWZldXhkN1hkV05id1U1TEZtUkU2TlNqem9scWxGemJ4dzNEdWkyZnlJSFd2eTdZYjU2LUVZ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data