



turn back the toxic tide

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High-Tech Toxic Trash Exported to Africa

USA and Europe Creating a “Digital Dump” from “Re-Use and Repair” Trade

Seattle, WA; Lagos, Nigeria. October 24, 2005. A new investigation by the toxic trade watchdog organization, Basel Action Network (BAN), has revealed that large quantities of obsolete computers, televisions, mobile phones, and other used electronic equipment exported from USA and Europe to Lagos, Nigeria for “re-use and repair” are ending up gathering dust in warehouses or being dumped and burned near residences in empty lots, roadsides and in swamps creating serious health and environmental contamination from the toxic leachate and smoke.

The photo-documentary report entitled “*The Digital Dump: Exporting High-Tech Re-use and Abuse to Africa*,” exposes the ugly underbelly of what is thought to be an escalating global trade in toxic, obsolete, discarded computers and other e-scrap collected in North America and Europe and sent to developing countries by waste brokers and so-called recyclers. In Lagos, while there is a legitimate robust market and ability to repair and refurbish old electronic equipment including computers, monitors, TVs and cell phones, the local experts complain that of the estimated 500 40-foot containers shipped to Lagos each month, as much as 75% of the imports are “junk” and are not economically repairable or marketable. Consequently, this e-waste, which is legally a hazardous waste is being discarded and routinely burned in what the environmentalists call yet “*another cyber-age nightmare now landing on the shores of developing countries.*”

“*Re-use is a good thing, bridging the digital divide is a good thing, but exporting loads of techno-trash in the name of these lofty ideals and seriously damaging the environment and health of poor communities in developing countries is criminal,*” said Jim Puckett, coordinator of BAN who led the field investigation.

The report includes evidence of numerous computer identification tags from schools and government agencies as well as forensic examinations of hard-drives picked up by BAN in Lagos, revealing very personal information about their previous owners.. According to BAN, much of this trade is illegal under international rules governing trade in toxic waste such as the Basel Convention, but governments, particularly the United States refuses to ratify, implement or properly enforce these rules for toxic electronic waste. Proper enforcement of these rules would require all such e-scrap exports, whole or in parts to be properly tested for functionality and certified to be going to re-

use destinations rather than for disposal or recycling.

“Things are completely out of control,” said Puckett. “Manufacturers have got to get toxic chemicals out of electronic goods, governments have got to start enforcing international law, and we consumers have got to be a lot more careful about what our local “recycler” is really doing. It’s time we all get serious about what is now a tsunami of toxic techno-trash making its way from rich to poorer countries, and start taking some responsibility.”

Following the publication of a report on their previous investigation in China, entitled *Exporting Harm: The High-Tech Trashing of Asia*, BAN, together with the Computer TakeBack Campaign has initiated the E-Stewards Program in North America with now over 30 member recycling companies that have pledged to uphold the world’s most rigorous standards for social and environmental responsibility in e-waste management. To locate a responsible recycler that won’t dump e-waste on developing countries visit: www.ban.org/pledge1.html or http://www.computertakeback.com/the_solutions/recyclers_map.cfm.

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Photos and Report available at: www.e-takeback.org/Press/pressinfo.htm

B-Roll Video material available: Contact Richard Gutierrez at rgutierrez@ban.org.

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