

Key findings from Taizhou Field Investigation

Greenpeace China and Basel Action Network investigators conducted a field investigation in the Taizhou city, Zhejiang Province in China between 11-13 February 2004. The primary findings can be summarized as follows:

Background:

- ◆ For 20 years now the dismantling of electric and mechanical equipment has taken place in Taizhou.
- ◆ In recent years the amount of the scrap work has increased dramatically, involving more imports and far more electronic waste, particularly an increase in the influx of personal computers.
- ◆ In May of 2002, the CCTV reported the instances of the E-waste dismantling in the large scrap yard operations in WenLing City, Taizhou region. The local government at that time was concerned about the impacts of the E-waste operations and organized a team to enforce local import bans and operating permits. It was declared that it was illegal to work on waste computers, monitors and televisions and that all work must be done in permitted facilities.

Taizhou Today:

- ◆ Despite the enforcement actions, it is clear that E-waste is being smuggled into the Taizhou region in two ways – smuggled in via container ships from various ports, and mixed into bulk steel and copper laden scrap coming primarily by bulkloader from Japan directly into the port of Taizhou.

1) Mixed Scrap Imports from Bulkloaded Vessels coming from Japan and Korea

- ◆ The port of Taizhou (Shujiang port) has become a phenomenal funnel for massive quantities of mixed metal scraps of all kinds that are offloaded 24 hours a day in two locations in the port of Taizhou. There, hundreds of green dump trucks line up to accept the waste picked up by cranes from bulkloading Japanese and Korean vessels. First the waste is offloaded into two very large holding areas and then they are reloaded and tarped – making their way to the many hundreds of scrap yards found in Taizhou. On any given hour, hundreds of such trucks are moving down the streets of Taizhou.
- ◆ The mixed scrap was observed to contain smashed computers, motors, electronic appliances as well as transformer carcasses.
- ◆ The electronic waste importation taking place in this manner is illegal under Chinese law as well as illegal under the Basel Convention without proper notification and consent from such exporting countries as Japan.
- ◆ State Environmental Protection Administration approves the imported waste and old materials from 5000 to 10,000 tons once a time. State Environmental Protection Administration only permits few kinds of waste and old materials import, such as waste steel, waste paper, and E-waste is excluded.
- ◆ In Taizhou, thousands of laborers work at Taizhou and Wenling with chisel and hammer and cutting torches on concrete floors of the waste scrap yards separating the various types of metals.
- ◆ Additionally, very harmful burning of the waste takes place to liberate the metals from the plastic insulation or housings.
- ◆ Dangerous use of cutting torches to open sealed units containing dielectric and refrigerant fluids is commonplace. We observed oil laden transformers being emptied and cut open with cutting torches without any protective clothing whatsoever. It is unknown whether the oils contain polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The transformer oils after further treatment is sold to factories for pitch or rubber overshoes.

2) E-waste smuggled into the Region and Processed by farmers

- ◆ Driving into the more rural areas around Taizhou revealed very widespread

small-scale operations by farm families which involved primitive e-waste processing – primarily the cooking over charcoal burners, of computer circuit boards to remove the various chips and components which are resold to acid strippers or for re-use.

- ◆ Farmers claim they are no longer able to make a living farming due to government policies and must resort to the more profitable processing of e-waste.
- ◆ It is unclear how the waste the farmers receive enters the country but much of it is said to be outsourced to them from the larger yards in the town of Taizhou. It is clear that this material either comes from Chinese sources or is imported on board container ships via ports all over China.
- ◆ Elderly men, women, and children are all involved in cooking the circuit boards. Such operations are very easy to find because of the acrid smell of solder fumes that permeates such regions.
- ◆ Additionally, circuit board shredding operations using rice floatation and skimming technology were found as well as small scale aluminum and copper smelters which melted the shredded e-waste and air-conditioning material.
- ◆ While the Taizhou area is not as yet involved with e-waste to the intensity of Guiyu in Guangdong Province, the operations seem to be growing and risks becoming as contaminated a region as Guiyu.

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