

Summary of Strategy for E-Waste Engagement in Greater China and the Asia-Pacific Region

Objective

EPA collaboration on “Cleaning Up E-Waste” in the Asia-Pacific region is intended to improve environmentally sound management of used electronics and to produce an outcome of reduced exposure to pollutants of concern.

Background

The management of used and end-of-life electronics has become an issue of widespread concern at the international level. Electronics contain materials that can pose environmental and human health hazards when these products are recycled, refurbished, or disposed of without adequate protection for workers and the local environment. Issues related to used electronics and e-waste are global in nature, involving multinational corporations, transboundary movement, and international markets for scraps and recycled commodities.

Both the United States and China are major manufacturers and consumers of electronics. In Mainland China and throughout the Asia-Pacific region, informal sector processing of used end-of-life electronics is a serious concern because of the environmental and health impacts associated with this industry. The media has also documented instances in which used electronics from the United States and other developed countries were shipped to the Asia-Pacific region, where they were recycled or otherwise processed by the informal sector, although comprehensive data does not exist on transboundary shipments of used electronics from the United States.

“Cleaning Up E-Waste” is one of the EPA’s six global priorities, established by the Administrator in early 2011. In July 2011, the US Government released the *National Strategy for Electronic Stewardship* which outlines recommendations for how the USG can actively address e-waste, both domestically and internationally, in a way that leads by example and emphasizes a lifecycle approach. One specific goal of the Strategy is to “Reduce Harm from US Exports of E-Waste and Improve Safe Handling of Used Electronics in Developing Countries”.

EPA’s collaboration on e-waste with partners in Greater China and the Asia-Pacific region supports the global goal of increasing the environmentally sound management of used and end-of-life electronics. It includes specific efforts to build capacity for the sound management of used electronics, improve information on global flows of used electronics, support efforts to enforce laws on the transboundary movement of used electronics, support life cycle approaches to electronics management, and encourage the use and number of certified recyclers. EPA seeks to ensure the regional benefit of these activities by targeting issues that reflect the needs of multiple bilateral partners, developing solutions and tools that can be replicated throughout the region and globally, and enhancing the exchange of expertise and information among regional and global experts.

Approach

EPA's approach to collaboration on e-waste in the Greater China and Asia-Pacific region consists of three steps:

Step 1: Engage stakeholders to identify key issues, needs, and priorities related to used electronics management in Greater China and the Asia-Pacific Region (including policies, technologies, tracking and incentive systems, transboundary movement and enforcement).

Step 2: Develop and implement potential solutions or appropriate mechanisms (including policy development, technical assistance, pilot projects, and inventories of environmental or economic impacts) that have regional implications or that address the needs of multiple regional partners.

Step 3: Enhance or formalize regional networks and work with global partners, including multilateral banks, industry and other donors, to ensure that information, expertise, and lessons learned are shared effectively and replicated globally.

Expected Outcomes

In addition to the end outcome of reduced exposure to pollutants of concern, EPA's Asia-Pacific e-waste activities aim to produce several intermediate outcomes. These include increased legal or technical capacity, such as through the development or enhancement of standards for electronics recycling facilities, and increased implementation of policies or strategies, such as extended producer responsibility policies.

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