COALITION FOR AMERICAN
ElectronicsRecycling

Protecting the Environment, Workers and National Security:
The Need for Responsible E-waste Export and Recycling Policies

From the smartphone in your pocket to the PC on your desk and beyond, technology constantly grows more pervasive in every area of our lives. But all those devices have a limited lifespan. As a result, electronic waste (e-waste) is the fastest-growing segment of the waste stream in the U.S. and globally. According to a January 2019 report by the World Economic Forum, global e-waste amounts to 50 million tons annually – and is projected to more than double to 120 million tons each year by 2050. The U.S. is the world's second-largest e-waste producer by volume at 6.3 million tons per year.

E-waste: A global environmental threat. E-waste contains toxic materials such as lead, PCBs, mercury and many more, so responsible recycling methods are essential to protecting the environment and the health of workers. Yet only 20 percent of e-waste is formally recycled, the World Economic Forum noted.

U.S. exports help fuel this global crisis. Unlike all other developed countries, the U.S. lacks a national policy on e-waste exports.

- We are the only developed country that has not ratified the Basel Convention on hazardous waste that includes the trans-boundary movement of e-waste.
- While the U.S. EPA regulates the export of hazardous waste under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, it exempts most e-waste except lead-lined glass cathode ray tubes used to build older models of TVs and computer monitors.

"E-waste is often incinerated or dumped in landfills, or makes its way around the world to be pulled apart by hand or burned by the world's poorest, to the detriment of health and the environment."

World Economic Forum
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Industry standards help deter exports – but are not enough. Most American businesses and consumers want their electronics to be recycled in ways that protect the environment and workers. Responsible e-waste recyclers are certified to the e-Stewards and/or R2 standards that address exports and other practices. But under current law it is easy for unscrupulous brokers to promise customers responsible recycling but then "pack and stack" the e-waste onto ships bound for developing countries that lack safeguards. It's a highly profitable business model – that poisons the land, air and water in impoverished communities.

U.S. e-waste exports fuel counterfeiting that threatens national security. E-waste exports provide feedstock for electronics counterfeiters, based primarily in China. The U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee study found more than 1 million fake parts in military equipment, raising serious reliability concerns for the men and women in our military. The report noted that counterfeiters use microchips stripped from e-waste, much of it exported from the United States, as their raw materials.

Supporting Responsible Recycling Policies

The Coalition for American Electronics Recycling (CAER) is the voice of the emerging e-waste recycling industry on Capitol Hill. Our industry will play an integral role in addressing the e-waste problem by providing secure, domestic e-recycling services for government and businesses. CAER includes more than 150 companies and supporting members operating more than 300 facilities in 37 states as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

In recent years, CAER has led the drive for export policies that solve these problems by requiring domestic recycling of untested, non-working electronics that fuel the environmental and security threats. Key initiatives include:

- **Secure E-waste Export and Recycling Act (SEERA).** CAER spearheaded introduction of this bipartisan legislation that proposed adding untested, nonworking e-waste to a list of materials restricted from export under the Export Controls Act of 2018 due to national security concerns related to counterfeiting. The legislation includes export exemptions for materials considered low-risk, including: tested, working used electronics; e-scrap that has been shredded or demanufactured, which may be exported for use as feedstock for smelters and other recycling processes; and recalled electronics, which may be exported for repairs. CAER plans to introduce similar legislation in the current session.

- **Department of Commerce Inquiry.** CAER and our member companies provided comments to regulations proposed by the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) that would strengthen U.S. government oversight of discarded electronic waste exports due to national security concerns. The proposed regulations embodied many of the provisions outlined in SEERA. The comment period concluded on Dec. 24, 2018 and Commerce is currently evaluating the responses.

Benefits

- The United States will finally gain better control of the export of all hazardous, untreated and untested e-waste.
- Business owners in the United States will have more incentive to invest in capital and employees to increase the capacity to process, refurbish and manage e-waste domestically.
- Through business expansion, the e-waste recycling industry will create up to 42,000 jobs.
- Exports of refurbished equipment and commodities refined from e-scrap will increase substantially.

**Please join us in this important cause
by co-sponsoring the reintroduction of SEERA in the 116th Congress**

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For more information, visit:
AmericanErecycling.org