E-waste and children's health

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Know the definition of e-waste, where it originates and how it moves around the world.
- Learn about potential toxic hazards associated with end of life management of e-waste (e-waste disposal, material recovery, open burning and formal/informal recycling), what they are, and the risks they may pose to children and young workers.
- Identify the exposure scenarios – how, where and when are children at risk?
- Be able to suspect diseases that may be related to acute and chronic exposures to chemicals present in e-waste or generated during recycling.
- Learn about international initiatives and proposed local interventions to prevent children's toxic exposures.
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OVERVIEW

- Origin, processes and circumstances of environmental risks related to e-waste
- Children: settings and routes of exposure
- Identification of most common hazardous chemicals potentially released
- Evidence of exposure and effects
- Prevention of exposure and poisoning
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E-WASTE DEFINITIONS

- Multiple definitions, examples:

  **OECD**
  “any appliance using an electric power supply that has reached its end-of-life”
  (UNEP 2007)

  **EUROPEAN COMMISSION**
  “waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) including all components, sub-assemblies and consumables, which are part of the product at the time of discarding”

Canelones Department - Uruguay, Picture by Dra. Raquel González
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LIFECYCLE OF ELECTRONICS

Material Extraction → Material Processing → Manufacturing → Use → Waste Management

↑ Recycle

↓ Remanufacture

↑ Reuse

↓ Repair
E-WASTE

- Electrical and electronic waste (e-waste), is a fast growing solid waste stream.

- About 40 million tonnes of e-waste are created globally each year.

- Secondary products and waste may be invisible to the production statistics.

- Complex and sometimes illegal e-waste trade goes to developing countries.
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ESTIMATED ANNUAL GENERATION OF E-WASTE AND MAJOR RECYCLING SITES - EXAMPLES

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E-WASTE AS A SOURCE OF VARIOUS CHEMICALS

- E-waste is a source of a variety of materials that can be recovered and brought back into the production cycle.

- Over 1,000 different chemicals are identified in the e-waste streams.

- Heavy metals, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and brominated flame retardants, such as polybrominated diphenylethers (PBDEs), plus a number of plastics components.
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ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC WASTE

- Monitors/computers/motherboards
- Telephones/mobile phones
- Chips
- Wireless devices/other peripheral items
- Printers, fax/photo copy machines
- Televisions
- Cathode ray tubes
- Transformers
- Audio - stereo equipment/video cameras
- Cables
- Lamps
- Large household appliances (e.g., refrigerators)
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E-WASTE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

Environmental pollution may be associated with...

- Open Burning Practice
- Recycling & Recovering
- Landfilling
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SUBSTANCES RELEASED: ENVIRONMENTAL PATHWAYS

(Sepúlveda et al., 2010)
TYPICAL CONTAMINATION SCENARIOS

- Dumping sites at or near riverbanks
- Villages situated along rivers that receive e-waste
- Manually disassembling and repairing
- E-waste open burning to extract valuable metals
- Final disposal sites or landfills
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E-WASTE AND HEALTH RISKS

E-waste materials are not only a source of environmental contamination but may also pose significant human health risks if improperly managed.
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HAZARDOUS EMISSIONS FROM INFORMAL RECYCLING PRACTICES

- Leachates from dumping activities
- Particulate matter (coarse and fine particles) from dismantling activities
- Fly and bottom ashes from burning activities
- Fumes from “cooking”, desoldering, and other burning activities
- Wastewater from dismantling and shredding facilities
- Effluents from leaching activities
- Evaporation of substances
- Revolatilization of chemicals from soil
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SOURCES OF CHILD EXPOSURE AT HOME AND SURROUNDINGS

- Recovering and recycling are often rudimentary in house or backyard operations
- Primitive recycling procedures through open cable burning, acid baths, and “cooking” circuit boards
- Home-based and family-run recycling activities

- Injury risk
- High levels of mixtures of chemicals contained in the materials
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**SETTINGS OF CHILD EXPOSURE**

- Children involved in burning activities and manual dismantling
- Children living in or close to houses with recycling activity
- Children manually sorting and picking of recyclable, reusable materials from mixed wastes
- Take home exposure from parents working with e-waste e.g. contaminated dust
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ROUTES OF CHILD EXPOSURE

- Contamination of the surrounding areas, soil, home surfaces (e.g. windowsills), water
- Atmospheric pollution due to burning and dismantling activities
- Inhalation of indoor or outdoor fumes
- Ingestion of:
  - Contaminated dust and soil
  - Contaminated drinking water
  - Contaminated food
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ROUTES OF PERINATAL EXPOSURE

- Mother’s intake and body burden is transferred across the placenta and through breast milk

- Breast milk represents "The very top of the food-chain."

- Note: In spite of the presence of contaminants WHO promotes breastfeeding as the optimal food for babies

WHO
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COMMON TOXICANTS RELEASED FROM E-WASTE UNSOUND ACTIVITIES

Metals
- Lithium
- Lead
- Cadmium
- Mercury
- Chromium VI

COPs
- PCDDs
- BFRs
- PCDFs
- PCBs

PAHs
If there is combustion

Batteries
Cathode ray tubes
Printed wiring boards
Printer inks and toners
Fluorescent lamps
Tapes and floppy-disks
Thermoplastics
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UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF E-WASTE TOXICANT EXPOSURES

- Children’s e-waste toxicant exposure depends on
  - Type of e-waste
  - Length of recycling history
  - Amount of e-waste recycling
  - Specialization in recycling process
  - Locations of the workshops
  - Parental involvement in recycling
  - Daily activities of the child

- Exposure to e-waste lasts a long time
  - Many recycling sites have operated for more than a decade
  - Pregnant women who grew up at the site would have higher exposure history than women who moved in at the time of marriage
  - Exposures to male men may affect spermatogenesis and lead to transgenerational effects
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LEAD

- Cathode Ray Tubes (CRTs) - found in older desktop computers and television sets - contain the greatest amount of all substances of concern, such as 2–3 kilograms of lead in each device.

Significantly higher proportion of elevated blood level (BLL ≥ 10 μg/dL) and correlation between placenta levels of lead (Pb) was found in residents of an e-waste recycling town in comparison to a non exposed neighbouring population.
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CADMIUM

- Common metal in mobile phone batteries
- Surface mount devices chip resistors
- Infrared detectors
- Semiconductor chips

High levels of placental and cord blood cadmium and the resulting expression of placental metallothionein were significantly associated with environmental exposure to cadmium in an e-waste recycling town.
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MERCURY

- Fluorescent lamps
- Some alkaline batteries
- Mercury wetted switches
- All the mercury annually used in electrical and electronic equipment accounts for about 22% of the world mercury consumption

Environmental and occupational mercury exposure has been associated with nephrotoxicity and neurological, cardiovascular and immune system alterations. Further research is needed to report mercury levels in populations with e-waste recycling activities.
POLYCYCLIC AROMATIC HYDROCARBONS (PAHS)

Product of incomplete open air combustion and dumping of processed e-waste materials contaminate air, soil, and sediment with high concentrations of PAHs.

Concentrations of 16 priority PAHs in suspended particles (TSP) and PM2.5 may be 10 and 20-fold greater in e-waste recycling areas than that at high transit-density cities.

Maternal PAHs exposure in e-waste sites results in fetal accumulation of toxic PAHs and adverse effects on neonatal health, particularly reduced neonatal height and gestational age.
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DIOXINS AND FURANS

- Open burning and acid leaching releases the largest amounts of dioxins and furans.

- The body burdens of dioxins in people from an e-waste processing site were ranked among the highest when compared to an international basis.

- Infants from e-waste polluted areas consume at least 25 times the WHO tolerable daily intake (TDI) (1-4 pg TEQ/kg body weight/day) compared to non-e-waste polluted areas.
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MULTIPLE TOXIC EFFECTS AND INTERACTIONS

- Additive effect
  - Common mode of action (PCDD/Fs – PAHs: antagonism of aryl hydrocarbon receptors)
  - Oxidative stress: POPs
  - Common target: Metals (Hg, Pb, Mn, Al)
  - Allergic reactions. Metals
  - Carcinogenic potential: Cr(VI), As, PAHs
  - Endocrine disruption: POPs
  - Immune suppression : POPs

- Persistence and bioaccumulation (eg: POPs, Hg) in animals and products
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MULTIPLE TOXIC EFFECTS ON CHILD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Neurodevelopmental deficits
- Damage to the blood and cardiovascular systems
- Respiratory diseases
- Skin problems
- Gastric diseases

E-waste workers suffer high incidences of birth defects and infant mortality.
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MULTIPLE NEUROTOXICANTS

Informal e-waste recycling: Chronic mixture exposure

- Lead
- Mercury
- Cadmium
- Chromium
- PBDEs
- PCBs (certain e-waste only)
- PCDDs/Fs, PAHs (combustion)

Toxicological mechanisms

- Oxidative stress
- Interfering calcium signaling
- Neurotransmission (gulatmatnergic, dopaminergic)
- Neuroendocrine (e.g., thyroid hormone disruption)
- Epigenetic control (gene expression)

Neurodevelopmental processes

- Proliferation
- Migration
- Differentiation
- Synaptic formation/trimming/plasticity
- Myelination

Neurodevelopmental outcomes

- Cognitive function
- Attention
- Executive functions
- Motor function
- Behavior

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HEALTH OUTCOMES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW
BY WHO AND WHO COLLABORATING CENTERS

- Alterations in thyroid function
- Associations between exposure to chromium, manganese and nickel; and lung function
- Reproductive health: adverse birth outcomes (preterm birth, low birth weight, stillbirth, and congenital malformations)
- In e-waste exposed populations height and weight were significantly lower than control population
- Mental health outcomes: behavioral alterations
- Alterations in cellular levels and function: DNA damage and chromosomal aberrations in lymphocytes
CHALLENGES TO TACKLE E-WASTE ISSUES

- Information on exposure is limited
- Children are the most vulnerable
- Long-lasting low dose exposure may cause diseases after many years
- Effects occur through a mixture of chemicals and different mechanisms
- There is high evidence of the toxicity of chemicals involved in e-waste contamination
- Social vulnerability in the genesis and persistance of the exposure
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WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT CHILD E-WASTE EXPOSURE?

Take action at:

Global Level

National Level

Local Level

WHO
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GLOBAL LEVEL: INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND TOOLS FOR ACTION

  - Controlling transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal

- Rotterdam Convention (1998)
  - Prior informed consent procedures for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade

- Stockholm Convention (2001)
  - Protecting human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants (POPs)
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EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

- Electronic Waste Initiative (UNIDO, 2004)
- Solving the E-Waste Problem (StEP, 2007)
- Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment (PACE, 2008)
- E-waste and children's health initiative (WHO, 2013)
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NATIONAL LEVEL

- Risk management
- Response to international agreements
- Implement standards, actions and programmes on e-waste toxicant exposures
- Improve downstream monitoring of e-waste
- Reuse and minimization waste policies
- “Take back” programs
- Maximize design for repairability, reuse and durable use
- Reduce the use and release of e-waste
- Reduce toxicity: phase-out certain chemicals
- Eradicate child labour within e-waste
LOCAL LEVEL

- Promote good practices in the process of recovery and recycling
- Invest in better solutions for recyclability and ease of disassembly
- Educate the community and workers
- Educate health care providers
- Surveillance and epidemiological vigilance for acute and chronic related illness
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HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS PLAY A KEY ROLE

- Identifying the problem
- Diagnose exposure and treat health effects
- Defining its local determinants and characteristics
- Educating colleagues and other professionals
- Informing the community – and the children
- Raising the awareness of policy-makers
- Promoting the implementation of the appropriate measures
- Helping to evaluate the efficacy of preventive measures
- Surveillance of exposure and effects.
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ROLE OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS
THE PEDIATRIC ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY
SUSPECTING EXPOSURE TO E-WASTE

- Include questions regarding e-waste disposal, recycling, recovery and open burning, in the Pediatric Environmental History (green page)

- Observe e-waste processes, e-waste dumping sites or ashes from past burning when visit homes
### E-waste and children's health

#### SUSPECTED EXPOSURE

- Apart from lead in blood, other pollutants may be difficult to measure in developing countries

<table>
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<th>Units</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breast Milk</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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CASE STUDIES: GUIYU, CHINA

❖ The town of Guiyu in China is the most studied e-waste town.

❖ Elevated heavy metals (e.g. lead) levels.

❖ Residents of Guiyu have reported of children suffering from breathing ailments, skin infections, and stomach diseases compared to neighboring population non e-waste exposed towns/cities.

❖ It has been described as the largest e-waste recycling site in the world.

❖ About 100,000 people are engaged in this activity, representing about 80 percent of the town’s population.
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CASE STUDIES: AGBOGBLOSHIE, GHANA

Agbogbloshie scrap market located in Accra is the main center for the recovery of materials from e-waste. Concentrations of Fe, Sb, and Pb in urine of e-waste recycling workers were significantly higher than those of reference sites after consideration of interaction by age, indicating that the recycling workers are exposed to these multi–trace elements through the recycling activity.

Personal air samples collected from workers and the environment revealed elevated levels for Al, Cu, Fe, Pb and Zn.

Of 100 soil samples taken, more than half were above the US Environmental Protection Agency standards for lead in soil.
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WERE THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES REACHED?

❖ Learn about chemical hazards in children – what they are and what are the risks they may pose?

❖ Identify the scenarios – how, where and when are children exposed?

❖ Be able to suspect diseases that may be related to acute and chronic exposures to chemicals present in e-waste or generated during recycling

❖ Learn about international initiatives and proposed actions to prevent children's toxic exposures
E-waste and children's health

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Reviewers: Aya Okada, MSc (Japan), Aimin Chen MD PhD (US), Ruth Etzel MD PhD (US), Innocent Chidi Nnorom PhD (Nigeria), Irena Buka MD (Canada), Christin Duffert (WHO Intern), David Seligson (ILO), Kwadwo A. Asante (Ghana), Phil Landrigan MD MSc (US), Antonio Pascale MD (Uruguay), Lilián Corra MD (Argentina), David Carpenter MD (US), Fernando Díaz-Barriga PhD (Mexico), Brenda Eskenazi MA PhD (US), Michelle Heacock PhD (US), Jinhui Li MS PhD (China), Peter Sly MD (Australia), Ruediger Kuehr PhD (UNU), Heidelore Fiedler PhD (UNEP), Matthias Kern PhD (UNEP-SBC).

Editing Assistance: Kathy Prout (WHO)

WHO CEH Training Project Coordination: Marie-Noel Bruné, MSc
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