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- Home
- News**
- Features
- Classifieds / Jobs
- RWM

- news
- jobs
- video
- features
- classified
- mrw conferences
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Illegal shipments of e-waste on the increase, new report warns - COMMENT UPDATE

Liz Gyekye
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The number of reported illegal shipments of hazardous waste from European Union countries to developing countries is increasing and better reporting of legal shipments needs to be made to understand the problem, a new report warns.

European Environment Agency report *Waste without borders* in the EU published on 4 March, says statistical data reported to the Commission by the member states "show a growing number of illegal shipments".

Between 2001 and 2005 member states reported increasing total annual illegal shipments of hazardous and problematic waste of between 6,000 and 47,000 tonnes with an average of about 22,000 tonnes – figures the report describes as "probably minimum".

The report's authors explained: "It is expected that reported cases represent a fraction of the actual number and that the number of illegal shipments is considerable."

The report also stated that analysis of trade statistics shows "that many discarded TV sets are shipped to Africa – their low prices are an indicator that some shipments are likely to be e-waste".

The export of e-waste from the EU to African countries is prohibited, and non-governmental organisations report that disposal of this waste is damaging the environment and causing serious health problems for those employed in the disposal process, the report says.

Every year each EU member state must submit a report to the European Commission on the annual amounts of hazardous and problematic waste imported and exported. Member states use the same codes that are used in the Basel Convention, the aim of the Convention is to protect human health and the environment from adverse effects caused by wastes, especially hazardous waste. But the report states that the "47 codes of the Basel Convention do not correspond very well to the waste streams actually exported, for example, there is no code that is clearly applicable to e-waste. As a result, more than one third of the notified waste is not classified because there is no code that is suitable for the waste".

The EEA has called for the EU to give more detailed reporting on legal shipments in order to give a better understanding of illegal practices.

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