



E-waste: challenges and opportunities for the world of work

WSIS 16.5.2012

David Seligson
Specialist on manufacturing
International Labour Office

DECENT WORK



- Only tripartite UN-organization
- 183 member states
- Strategic objectives:
 - To promote and realize standards, and **fundamental principles and rights at work**
 - To create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent **employment**
 - To enhance the coverage and effectiveness of **social protection** for all
 - To strengthen **tripartism and social dialogue**



E-sales leads to e-waste

- Today a million computers will be sold
- E-waste is the fastest growing waste stream

Protection of the
environment



Scarcity of raw
materials



Need to reuse and recycle

DECENT WORK





Who are the people working with e-waste?

DECENT WORK





©2009 Basel Action Network (BAN)

DECENT WORK



Geneva 16.5.2012



DECENT WORK



Geneva 16.5.2012



©2006 Basel Action Network (BAN)

DECENT WORK



Geneva 16.5.2012



Photo: Alex Hafford

Geneva 16.5.2012

DECENT WORK





Photo: Sayantan Bera/CSE



DECENT WORK





Numbers????

- Some estimations:
 - Ghana 25,000 (supporting 200,000)
 - China perhaps 10 millions and 60,000 enterprises
 - India 80,000
 - USA 30,000



Characteristics of work with e-waste

- Mostly informal work: unrecorded, unregulated
- Labour intensive
- Low earnings
- Often dangerous
- Many times illegal

Formal and informal recycling often interlinked



E-waste flow in India (Skinner, Lloyd, Dinter & Strothmann 2010)

DECENT WORK





Problems with informality

- No identifiable employer with responsibility
- Lack of health insurance, pension schemes, unemployment insurance
- Lack of awareness of workers' rights and lack of awareness for safety and health issues
- Child labour
- Environmental hazards and inefficient recovery of materials

DECENT WORK





Tackling informality

- Difficult task:
 - Regulations
 - Enforcement
 - Economic and other incentives

DECENT WORK





Problems with human health

- Main risk from heavy metals, POPs, flame retardants and other hazardous substances
- Three main groups:
 - Original constituents (e.g. mercury)
 - Substances added during recovery processes (e.g. cyanide)
 - Substances formed by recovery processes (e.g. dioxins)



How can we solve the problems?

- International solutions: regulating e-waste streams
- Local solutions: enforcing regulations, offering incentives to informal recyclers
- ESM and OSH go hand in hand



Opportunities

- E-waste widely recognized and easily understood by the public
- Volumes increase and every country has to manage its e-waste
- Recycling more and more important economically
- Can create employment, both low-skilled and high-skilled

DECENT WORK

