

## UN warns of environmental e-waste catastrophe

25th March 2024



The United Nations has issued a stark warning to consumers worldwide. The volume of electronics we are throwing away is creating an "environmental catastrophe". We are disposing of record amounts of "e-waste". The UN defines

electronics as anything with a plug or a battery, and often contains toxic chemicals and substances, such as lead and mercury. E-waste includes discarded cellphones, refrigerators and e-cigarettes. The UN Global E-waste Monitor has reported that in 2022, the world generated a mind-blowing 62 million tons of e-waste. CNN said this waste could, "fill more than 1.5 million 40-ton trucks which, if placed bumper-to-bumper, could...wrap around the Equator".

Most e-waste comes from developed countries. A lot of it is sent to poorer countries for recycling. However, these countries lack the technology and resources to dispose of it in a way that minimizes environmental damage. The sheer volume of waste is creating a plethora of health problems. Dumped electronics are poisoning rivers and seas. A disturbing 58 tons of mercury entered the environment last year. Some of this enters the food chain. The UN blamed manufacturers for showing "a lack of duty of care" by failing to accept responsibility for what happens to their products. It also blamed consumers, saying, "it's just a few clicks" to buy electronics, but "it's far more difficult to dispose of them".

Sources: [cnn.com](http://cnn.com) / [aljazeera.com](http://aljazeera.com) / [foxnews.com](http://foxnews.com)

### Writing

We should have to pay when we throw anything away.

### Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

United Nations / warning / consumers / electronics / e-waste / toxic chemicals / plug / developed countries / environmental damage / health problems / food chain / duty

### True / False

- 1) The UN has issued its highest warning regarding the disposal of e-waste. T / F
- 2) The UN said there are too many records in the e-waste. T / F
- 3) The UN said electronics was anything with a plug or a battery. T / F
- 4) The UN said the amount of e-waste we produce could fill the Equator. T / F
- 5) Poorer countries are responsible for most of the world's e-waste. T / F
- 6) The e-waste we are creating is causing many health problems. T / F
- 7) The UN said 58 tons of mercury enters the food chain every year. T / F
- 8) The UN blamed customers and manufacturers for the e-waste. T / F

### Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. <b>stark</b>      | a. amenities    |
| 2. <b>volume</b>     | b. tossed out   |
| 3. <b>toxic</b>      | c. keeps down   |
| 4. <b>discarded</b>  | d. amount       |
| 5. <b>placed</b>     | e. considerably |
| 6. <b>resources</b>  | f. positioned   |
| 7. <b>minimizes</b>  | g. miserable    |
| 8. <b>plethora</b>   | h. worrying     |
| 9. <b>disturbing</b> | i. poisonous    |
| 10. <b>far</b>       | j. abundance    |

### Discussion – Student A

- a) How do you get rid of the electronics you throw away?
- b) How bad are refrigerators for the environment?
- c) What electronics do we really, really need?
- d) How can we make electronics less harmful to the environment?
- e) Should we all buy used or reconditioned electronics?
- f) What happens when the landfills are full of waste?
- g) How do you feel when you see discarded electronics in the countryside?
- h) What's the best way to discard electronics?

## Phrase Match

- |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. issued a stark warning       | a. bumper-to-bumper             |
| 2. anything with a plug         | b. of care                      |
| 3. substances, such as lead and | c. mind-blowing 62 million tons |
| 4. the world generated a        | d. the technology               |
| 5. if placed                    | e. consumers                    |
| 6. sent to poorer countries     | f. to consumers worldwide       |
| 7. these countries lack         | g. for recycling                |
| 8. creating a plethora          | h. or a battery                 |
| 9. showing a lack of duty       | i. of health problems           |
| 10. It also blamed              | j. mercury                      |

## Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- What kind of catastrophe might the UN be talking about?
- Should developed countries recycle their own discarded electronics?
- What health problems do discarded electronics cause?
- How harmful is mercury?
- How can we reverse our consumerism?
- What responsibility do manufacturers have in electronics disposal?
- What questions would you like to ask the UN?

## Spelling

- issued a raskt warning
- luovem of electronics
- ixtoc chemicals
- lead and recrymu
- fsoraertgerir and e-cigarettes
- wrap around the routEaq
- sent to poorer countries for Inricgeyc
- mniisneiz environmental damage
- a raolhept of health problems
- electronics are nsigpinoo rivers
- The UN blamed uturamcerfans
- failing to accept irlsieityobsnp

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. i	4. b	5. f
6. a	7. c	8. j	9. h	10. e

## Role Play

### Role A – TVs

You think TVs cause the most damage to the environment when discarded. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as bad. Also, tell the others which is the least harmful of these (and why): fridges, smartphones or printers.

### Role B – Fridges

You think fridges cause the most damage to the environment when discarded. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as bad. Also, tell the others which is the least harmful of these (and why): TVs, smartphones or printers.

### Role C – Smartphones

You think smartphones cause the most damage to the environment when discarded. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as bad. Also, tell the others which is the least harmful of these (and why): fridges, TVs or printers.

### Role D – Printers

You think printers cause the most damage to the environment when discarded. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their things aren't as bad. Also, tell the others which is the least harmful of these (and why): fridges, smartphones or TVs.

## Speaking – Electronics

Rank these with your partner. Put the most harmful to the environment at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| • TVs          | • Smartphones      |
| • Fridges      | • Air conditioners |
| • Computers    | • Microwave ovens  |
| • E-cigarettes | • Printers         |

### Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	F	5	F	6	T	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.