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| Monday , March 7 , 2011 |

IN TODAY'S PAPER

- [Front Page](#)
- [Nation](#)
- [Calcutta](#)
- [Bengal](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [International](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [At Leisure](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Sudoku](#)
- [Crossword](#)
- [Jumble](#)
- [Gallery](#)
- [Horse Racing](#)
- [Travel](#)

WEEKLY FEATURES

- [Knowhow](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Telekids](#)
- [Personal TT](#)
- [7days](#)
- [Graphiti](#)

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Calcutta Weather

Temperature
Min : 23.9°C (+4)
Max : 35.1°C (+2)

Relative Humidity:

Max : 80% Min : 30%

Sunrise : 5:53 AM

Sunset : 5:43 PM

Today

Mainly clear sky. Maximum temperature likely to be around 35°C.

[Front Page](#) > [Calcutta](#) > [Story](#)

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E-waste multiplies, recycle option absent

JAYANTA BASU



Discarded electronic items being sold on a Chandni Chowk footpath. A Telegraph picture

Calcutta is generating much more electronic waste than a few years back and very little of it is being recycled, increasing the risk of an environment disaster.

A recent study by the state pollution control board along with the central pollution control board, the Indian Chamber of Commerce and German organisation GiZ has found that nearly 26,000 tonnes of e-waste is generated in the Calcutta Metropolitan Area (CMA) every year.

The CMA includes the city and its suburbs like Howrah, Salt Lake, Kalyani, Barasat and Uluberia.

The figure is almost thrice the annual e-waste generation estimate of 9,000 tonnes by Delhi-based organisation Toxic Link and Jadavpur University five years ago.

The recent study predicts e-waste generation will shoot up nearly six times to about 1,45,000 tonnes within a decade.

"The 12 e-waste hotspots in the city are Chandni Chowk, Biplabi Anukul Chandra Street (Prinsep Street), Maniktala, Kankurgachhi, Phoolbagan, Kadapara, Tarak Pramanik Road, Rajabazar, Hazra, Topsia in Calcutta and Ghusuri and Bajrangbali areas in Howrah," said Shyamal Adhikary, a senior engineer in the state pollution control board who looks after waste management.

"The board has been facilitating the setting up of an e-waste reprocessing unit in Bengal by 2011-12," he added. Over the past few years, 20 such units have been set up in India.

TV sets and their components constitute over 60 per cent of the e-waste generated in the CMA. Abandoned computers and refrigerators contribute 15 per cent each to the waste dump. Cellphones, CDs and DVDs make up the rest.

According to experts, the most alarming aspect of e-waste is that only 2,022 tonnes of it is being recycled — that too mostly in an unorganised manner. Thus more than 90 per cent of e-waste remains dumped in houses and offices or gets mixed with other forms of waste.

The saleable parts of e-waste, such as cables, plastic cases, condensers and batteries, are manually removed in the city. Unorganised recycling of e-waste, including generation of heavy metal dust during dismantling or crushing of abandoned gadgets and emission of noxious fumes during acid treatment and burning of e-waste, is dangerous.

"Toxic emission not only affects those who recycle e-waste manually but also people in the neighbourhood," said an expert who was associated with the recent study.

"Lead, cadmium, mercury, chromium and beryllium, present in e-waste, are extremely toxic and often carcinogenic," said Aniruddha Mukherjee of Calcutta University's environment department.

When such waste is dumped randomly, toxic materials get mixed with the soil and contaminate ground water. This can result in neurological disorders, kidney damage, reproductive problems, cancer and lung, eye and skin diseases.

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