Negative: SEERA / E-Waste

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

***Resolved: The United States Federal Government should significantly reform its import and/or export policy within the bounds of international trade***

Case Summary: The AFF plan enacts the Secure E-Waste Export and Recycling Act (SEERA). This bill bans the export of non-working electronic components (i.e. “e-waste”) out of the United States.

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Negative: SEERA / E-Waste

OVERVIEW

It’s about blocking competition, not the environment or national security

**[OEM’s – Original Equipment Manufacturers – don’t like it when small companies overseas get cheap recycled parts, refurbish them, and make low-cost equipment or low-cost replacement parts that compete with their own products. SEERA is using “environment” and “national security” as excuses to block competition and increase their profits at consumers’ expense.]**

Robin Ingenthron 2022. (*founder and CEO of Vermont-based electronics reuse and recycling company Good Point Recycling. Ingenthron is also the founder of Fair Trade Recycling (WR3A), a cooperative organization promoting best practices in reuse and recycling in emerging markets*) 7 Apr 2022 “[In My Opinion: Allowing exports is how America COMPETES best](https://resource-recycling.com/e-scrap/2022/04/07/in-my-opinion-allowing-exports-is-how-america-competes-best/)” <https://resource-recycling.com/e-scrap/2022/04/07/in-my-opinion-allowing-exports-is-how-america-competes-best/> (accessed 15 May 2022)

It was never about responsibility or security or counterfeiting. Those are all vocabulary words (like turning “inheritance tax” into “death tax”), co-opting environmentalists’ goals to protect OEM Asia factory relationships from competition with America’s used products.

INHERENCY

1. African policies working

Africa is creating good systems for managing e-waste. Electronics reuse/recycling under present conditions is good

[Doreen Bogdan-Martin](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/authors/doreen-bogdan-martin) 2022 (Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union) 25 Mar 2022 “How Africa is leading the way in dealing with 'e-waste'”   <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/how-to-solve-the-global-e-waste-issue-4-lessons-from-africa/> (accessed 16 May 2022)

Africa’s experience managing e-waste provides interesting approaches for all countries to consider when building an e-waste management system. Of course, continuous improvement is necessary to ensure that the e-waste management system can adapt as needed. Governments should make use of existing networks – for example, existing collection systems for other waste streams – to ensure the systems remain relevant. They must also encourage data sharing among stakeholders and establish national working groups on e-waste and EPR. Such steps made by government help set standards for new ways of working, living and doing business. Critically, they also highlight a key message: that all stakeholders should value electronics reuse and recycling.

2. Ghana and Nigeria have good policies in place

Ghana & Nigeria are pursuing the best practice: Self-financing import recycling management program

[Doreen Bogdan-Martin](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/authors/doreen-bogdan-martin) 2022 (Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union) 25 Mar 2022 “How Africa is leading the way in dealing with 'e-waste'”   <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/how-to-solve-the-global-e-waste-issue-4-lessons-from-africa/> (accessed 16 May 2022) (brackets added)

The most sustainable system is one that is self-financing, which is why the role of businesses and entrepreneurs in e-waste management is essential. In Nigeria, producers help cover the cost of e-waste management – including waste collection, separation and transfer, treatment and recycling and final disposal, as well as public information and awareness campaigns and training programmes. These manufacturers, assemblers, importers and distributors pay a fee to the not-for-profit [E-waste Producer Responsibility Organisation Nigeria](https://epron.org.ng/), ensuring shared responsibility and funding for e-waste processing. This approach also ensures the EPR [extended producer responsibility] scheme remains resilient. Regulation can help protect these financing schemes. Ghana introduced an e-waste eco-levy on the import of used and end-of-life electrical and electronic equipment. The Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority spearheads enforcement of the eco-levy which makes the system more resilient and ensures the cost of e-waste management remains covered.

3. Market forces

Consumer demand is trending away from accepting e-waste and demanding trade-in and recycling

MorganStanley 2020. (investment brokerage firm) 24 Aug 2020 “Consumers Send Strong Signal on Electronics Sustainability” <https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/consumer-electronics-sustainability> (accessed 17 May 2022)

A February survey from AlphaWise, the proprietary survey and data arm of [Morgan Stanley Research](https://www.morganstanley.com/what-we-do/research), found that consumers in five countries felt growing concern around the dangers of e-waste. With habits shifting as a result, the [tech hardware industry](https://www.morganstanley.com/Themes/tech-media-telecom-trends-insights-outlook) will need to adapt to keep customers trading up to newer, more-powerful devices. A new wave of environmentalism may only reinforce consumer resolve to discard and upgrade responsibly, says [Jessica Alsford, Head of Morgan Stanley Global Sustainability Research](https://www.morganstanley.com/profiles/jessica-alsford-managing-director). “Just as with single-use plastic and sustainable apparel, e-waste could be another focal point for responsible consumerism.” The upshot for investors? Manufacturers with established trade-in and recycling programs may be best positioned to capitalize on consumers' greener habits while cutting down on harmful e- waste.
**END QUOTE. THEY GO ON LATER IN THE CONTEXT SAYING QUOTE**:
Morgan Stanley's AlphaWise survey suggests the tide is turning quickly in favor of [sustainability](https://www.morganstanley.com/what-we-do/institute-for-sustainable-investing), however, with trade-in programs and recycling on the rise. In just two years, the share of respondents who trade-in or recycle devices has more than doubled to 48% and 54%, respectively. And in a sign that consumers are aiming to maximize the lifespan of their electronics, nearly 80 percent either have repaired or plan to repair their devices within the next two years.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

1. Functional, not junk

Importers overseas don’t take it if it’s junk, and it’s not being dumped. They use and refurbish what we export

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The contract manufacturers don’t need monitors that are “tested working.” All they may need to build a new unit for sale is a scrap monitor’s LC diode and backlight, for example.  To major factories such as these, “functionality” is a quaint constraint. These overseas refurbishers don’t want junk and won’t buy 80% of the goods recyclers collect here. The myth, dating back to 2010, that 80% of what overseas importers inspect and buy is being dumped days later has been disproven by numerous academic researchers, as well as by the Basel Convention Secretariat in Geneva.

Export of “junk” is exaggerated and based on phony numbers. Poor countries don’t pay to import useless junk

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You see, the economics of "ewaste" exporting has never, ever supported the Watchdog's claim that "80%" of used electronics exports are unwanted junk. They claim that the low cost of disposal pays for sea container trips across the ocean. There is definitely validity to the claim that environmental standards are lax, as they are for mining (the only opposite of recycling). But that does not create an incentive for poor people to pool their money to buy crap. And after a little digging, I came up with a dirty little secret: The 80 percent export statistic was made up out of thin air. There is absolutely not one stitch of data to support it. The watchdog organization has been referring to circular sources (other articles in which they were quoted with the same claim). They meant well – but in their passion to improve the pollution, they did not know what they were talking about and began to make it up as they went along.

No e-waste crisis in China, and whatever junk there is, most of it comes from China itself

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The most hilarious example of this silly campaign is perhaps the [60 Minutes episode on e-waste exports to China](http://retroworks.blogspot.com/2010/07/60-minutes-wastelands-missing-minutes_17.html). CBS circled computer monitors in Hong Kong, then "followed the trail" to Guiyu, where they saw not a single darn computer monitor anywhere. On the way, they passed one of the largest white box refurbishing factories, which I'd given them film of. They found a cesspool in the area of Shenzhen, China (where [all the IPhone and Android and Ipads are made](http://motherboard.tv/2010/9/13/meet-the-young-chinese-workers-who-made-your-computer)) and they told a story that a rinky-dink scrap metal shop was the best available recycling technology, what Scott Pelley calls "a tidy little shop". Too bad they missed the fact there were no CRT monitors there, or that most of the junk came not from the U.S. but from rapidly affluent Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou.

Chinese objection to “dumping” was a mis-translation regarding trade rules, not waste disposal

**[“Dumping” in the trade sense means temporarily exporting a product in foreign trade with government subsidies to the exporter that make the sale price less than the cost of manufacturing it. This is done to undercut competition and corner the market. Once they control the market, they can then raise prices and make extra profits.]**

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In 2002, the Chinese tried to close the secondary market, calling refurbished CRTs "dumping". While in China I had it translated: that's "dumping" in the below-tariff sense. The junk was allowed as a raw material, and "treatment" meant breaking stuff so it would not be resold. The watchdogs mis-translated the "dumping" ban as an environmental enforcement, and the Chinese picked right up on that, adding the law to environmental statutes. But the supply and demand forces continued. The white box market was too good to abandon, and the geek factories quickly set up in other southeast Asian countries.

No crisis in Ghana – 90% has no impact: 70% of e-waste is still working, 20% is being repaired

Adam Minter 2015 (journalist who visited the Agbogbloshie, Ghana e-waste “dump” site) 16 June 2015 “Anatomy of a Myth: the World’s Biggest E-Waste Dump Isn’t.” <https://shanghaiscrap.com/2015/06/anatomy-of-a-myth-the-worlds-biggest-e-waste-dump-isnt/> (accessed 17 May 2022)

So how much scrap ends up in Agbogbloshie every day? The [only study](http://www.basel.int/Portals/4/Basel%20Convention/docs/eWaste/E-wasteAssessmentGhana.pdf) that’s ever tackled the question systematically was published in 2011 (funded by the European Commission, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the Dutch Recyclers Association, and coordinated by the Secretariat of the Basel Convention), and it found that – in 2009 – Ghana (not just Accra) imported 215,000 tons of used electronics. That sounds bad until you read the kicker: of that imported electronics, 70% was still functioning and usable, and the other 20% could be repaired. And it was repaired. Indeed, Ghana, like much of West Africa, is a major hub for the re-use, repair, and refurbishment of used goods from around the world – everything from furniture to mobile phones. Drive around any city in Ghana, and you’ll see entrepreneurs who’ve imported and refurbished used goods (increasingly from China), and now offer them for sale to the large swath of the population that can’t afford new (the wonderful Yepoka Yeebo recently produced [an excellent photo essay](http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2015/ghanaian-hustle/) on this industry for Roads and Kingdoms).

2. No national security threat

Used electronics are not being turned into military threats, and most of it never comes back to the US anyway

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Now, those who support the passage of this language in SEERA  or the COMPETES Act [say the bill will protect national security](https://www.whitehouse.senate.gov/news/release/whitehouse-tillis-introduce-bipartisan-bill-to-address-e-waste-national-security-threat-grow-domestic-recycling-industry-) by preventing companies in China and elsewhere from buying U.S. e-scrap and then re-selling components back into U.S. supply chains as counterfeit goods.

Remanufacturing is the best case, the “upcycling” of electronics. It extends all of the carbon and pollution costs embodied in the previous manufacture, and makes affordable devices. Usually those remanufactured laptops, phones, computers and printers are sold in less wealthy markets, where brand new is not an option. But SEERA (in its various forms) imagines that our used TV parts are being counterfeited into guns and supplied to American soldiers. That’s right. Read it again. That’s what the lobbyists claim is the “security” problem. This is the false flag.

An OEM attempt to stifle competition

#RightToRepair, meet your cousin, #RightToRefurbish. You have a lot of lobbyists sneaking up behind you. Face each other and call out the false flag “counterfeit” claims. No one believes that a TV tuner board is being turned into a gun and sold to an unsuspecting American soldier.

3. No export problem

Vast majority of electronics in the US are recycled in the US

Katie Campbell and Ken Christensen 2016 (journalists) Where does America’s e-waste end up? GPS tracker tells all 10 May 2016 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/america-e-waste-gps-tracker-tells-all-earthfix> (accessed 17 May 2022)

“The vast majority of electronics collected for recycling in the U.S. are recycled in the U.S.,” said Eric Harris of the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, a Washington, D.C.-based recycling trade association. “We would really challenge the notion that there’s a mass exodus of equipment that’s leaving in an unprocessed manner.”

4. Exaggerated numbers

No, there aren’t “hundreds of millions” of tons of e-waste being exported

Adam Minter 2015 (journalist who visited the Agbogbloshie, Ghana e-waste “dump” site) 16 June 2015 “Anatomy of a Myth: the World’s Biggest E-Waste Dump Isn’t.” <https://shanghaiscrap.com/2015/06/anatomy-of-a-myth-the-worlds-biggest-e-waste-dump-isnt/> (accessed 17 May 2022)

But, for some reason, the media organizations that insist on sending photographers to document Agbogbloshie never bother to look up the 2011 study, or do the calculation. Rather, they just say whatever sounds most shocking. For example, as far back as 2008 (to be fair, pre-study), [PBS Frontline claimed](http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/ghana804/video/video_index.html) that “hundreds of million of tons” of e-waste arrive at Agbogbloshie annually (which would make e-waste one of the world’s most shipped manufactured goods)!  Most news organizations, however, are a bit more responsible, and either hedge their bets by sticking to “biggest” and “largest” or – as [in the case of Gizmodo](http://gizmodo.com/e-hell-on-earth-where-the-wests-electronics-go-to-die-1442576665) – show a bit more courage (though not more sourcing) and say “millions of tons.” None of this is even remotely true.

SOLVENCY

1. Already tried & failed

AFF Plan advocate admits: Nothing changed after every other major country in the world did the Plan

Katie Campbell and Ken Christensen 2016 (journalists) Where does America’s e-waste end up? GPS tracker tells all 10 May 2016 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/america-e-waste-gps-tracker-tells-all-earthfix> (accessed 17 May 2022) (brackets added)

[AFF advocate, Director of Basel Action Network, Jim] Puckett’s documentary came out more than a decade after nearly every developed nation on the globe had ratified the [Basel Convention](http://www.basel.int/), an international treaty to stop developed countries from dumping hazardous waste on poorer nations. Now, more than a quarter-century after that treaty was written, and more than 15 years since he exposed Guiyu, Puckett said little has changed.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Lose jobs to China

SEERA loses valuable US exports and sacrifices jobs to China

**[“COMPETES” Act is a bill pending in Congress that contains a section that enacts SEERA along with other provisions.]**

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America already competes very well in the sale of used electronics overseas – our used goods are the best in the world. Shredding those up prior to export, as SEERA instructs, will sacrifice a lot of value. And where exactly are the new electronics being manufactured today? In China. So the COMPETES Act sacrifices American reuse jobs to support manufacturing in China.

2. Reduced competition

Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) support SEERA because they want to block low-priced competition against their products

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The OEMs just don’t like it when one of those factories – such as Wistron – decides to put its own brand (Acer) on remanufactured goods. And that’s what this bill is about: the OEMs attempting to prevent shipments to the overseas contract manufacturing industry, which makes “good enough” new products using key reused components from e-scrap they buy from the U.S.

US businesses and the Chinese Communist Party hate overseas electronic recycling because they resent the competition

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The Geeks of Color could not believe their luck when parts worth $110 – like a good, non-trinitron, 17", uncancelled cathode ray tube – were being sold to them for $5. They quickly stopped buying brand new CRTs and started assembling monitors and televisions from 5-10 year old USA monitors which had been "upgraded". This hurt the brand names which did not like competing with their own product in the secondary market. But even worse, it hurt the largest shareholder in new Cathode Ray Tube manufacturing in the world: The Chinese Communist Party.

Impact: Consumers harmed. Consumer welfare is reduced when government policy blocks market competition

Prof. Todd Zywicki and James C. Cooper 2007 (ZYWICKI - Professor of Law, George Mason University School of Law Research Fellow, James Buchanan Center for Political Economy Program on Politics, Philosophy, and Economics. Cooper – Deputy Director, Office of Policy Planning, US Federal Trade Commission) The U.S. Federal Trade Commission and Competition Advocacy: Lessons for Latin American Competition Policy <https://www.law.gmu.edu/assets/files/publications/working_papers/07-07.pdf> (accessed 17 May 2022; gray notations added)



3. Economic harm to poor countries

Blocking electronic component exports removes business opportunities in poor countries

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Big electronics brands have long relied on Asian or South American subcontractors such as Wistron, Foxconn, or Proview to assemble their electronics. But those contract manufacturers are also building smartphones and flat-screen TVs out of what the World Trade Organization (WTO) calls “cores,” or key components, and then reselling them in emerging markets.  They’ve been doing this for some time. Over a decade ago, factories that assembled CRT monitors for HP or Dell knew the CRT lasted 25 years and was the most expensive component. By reusing a $10, four-year old SVGA monitor to replace a $110 brand new CRT, they were cutting costs in half for customers in India, Nigeria, Brazil and other emerging markets.

Really should ask the e-waste workers what they want. They probably prefer to keep their jobs

Kurt Daum, Dr. Justin Stoler and Prof. Richard J. Grant 2017. (Daum - Department of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Miami. Stoler – PhD; MPH; Assistant Professor of Geography, Univ. of Miami. Grant - prog. of geography, U. of Miami) Toward a More Sustainable Trajectory for E-Waste Policy: A Review of a Decade of E-Waste Research in Accra, Ghana INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH & PUBLIC HEALTH 29 Jan 2017 <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/14/2/135/htm> (accessed 17 May 2022)

The voices of e-waste workers remain largely absent throughout the e-waste literature. Understanding the lived experiences of workers is of great importance because such testimonies help create more holistic images of life on the ground. Photographs of young men leaning over dark smoke clouds surrounded by rubbish and ash have permeated international public spheres; while such images often bring public attention to the adverse health outcomes and living environments of these workers, they often obscure the benefits workers receive from their work. For e-waste workers, collecting scrap and burning metals over open flames are sometimes deeply rooted in building their identity, pride, and better futures. Informal workers, like workers in all professional fields, are producers of knowledge and reality; if such realities continue to be framed by hysteria, then social equality, understanding, and in turn, inclusion will be difficult to attain.

E-waste export bans victimize Africa: It blocks them from starting at the ground floor of economic development in the computer industry

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Besides the environment, the biggest victim is probably Africa. Countries there must pay more for refurbished equipment, and many are now the target of a campaign to make sure they don't get their own "white box" factories. This will take away Africa's chance to follow the same "tinkerer and geek" path of development which Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, and other Asian Tigers used. Throughout modern history, geeks and tinkerers have climbed the ladder from used sales to repairs to contract assembly to original equipment manufacturing.

Link & Brink: Recycling electronic junk is the only economic option for some poor citizens in Africa. It’s that or nothing

Jim Harper 2011. (JD from Univ. of California – Hastings College of Law; founding member of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Data Privacy and Integrity Advisory Committee) 20 Sept 2011 “Soft Heart, Soft Head?” <https://www.cato.org/blog/soft-heart-soft-head> (accessed 17 May 2022)

Yesterday, I came across a short Atlantic essay on the plight of children in Accra’s Abogbloshie slum entitled “[The Hardware Scavengers of Ghana](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/09/the-hardware-scavengers-of-ghana/245132/).” One particular sentence stood out for succinctly crystallizing the problem, and for its near‐​perfect internal inconsistency: “These kids are shortening their lives, but they don’t have any other options.” You see, if they have no other options, the toxic job of electronics recycling—burning insulation off copper wires, applying degreasing solvents with bare hands, and so on—is extending their lives, not shortening them. According to the [underlying article and interview on Mongabay​.com](http://news.mongabay.com/2011/0909-moukaddem_ewaste.html), many of the recyclers come from Northern Ghana to escape poverty, maltreatment, “food insecurity,” and sectarian strife. The choice is not between recycling and school. It is between encountering carcinogens and neurotoxins or encountering violence, starvation, and death.

Impact: 200,000 jobs in Ghana

Dr. Thomas Maes and Fiona Preston-Whyte 2022. (Maes – PhD in marine litter; Principal Scientist at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, UK. Preston-Whyte - Researcher. Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, UK) “E-waste it wisely: lessons from Africa” 5 Feb 2022 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42452-022-04962-9> (accessed 17 May 2022)

The transport of used EEE and e-waste to Africa, has resulted in an informal, yet important industry, with far reaching consequences. Used EEE, and repairable EEE, have permitted individuals and companies to buy inexpensive and vital electronics or IT equipment, helping socioeconomic development. Informal e-waste recycling provides a major source of livelihood for many poor urban communities. The informal sector contributes to 25% of the e-waste recycling in South Africa, with an estimated workforce of 10,000 with 2000 regular workers in 2013. Within Ghana, in 2014, e-waste activities generated US$105–268 million, creating employment for at least 200,000 people nationwide.

Impact: Starvation, violence and war without e-waste recycling opportunities

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Solving the problem of e‑waste might be a comfort to readers of the Atlantic concerned with their own environment and susceptibility to cancer. But if the statement about poor Ghanians’ options is true, such “solutions” would consign children and young men to death of starvation, violence, and war.

Impact: Poor recyclers in Ghana would go from bad to worse without e-waste

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I don’t know what improvements in trade policy (ours or theirs), rule of law, taxation or regulation might bring the wealth to Ghana that sustains its people better. I wish Ghana the relative luxury of controlling toxic waste, moving people from slum to suburbs, and so on. But if softness in our hearts leads us to soft‐​headedly sweep Ghana’s poorest from bad health conditions into conditions of death by starvation and violence, I think that would compound the tragedy.

4. Sham recyclers

Link: We should be “encouraging” exports, not banning them. It would give the poor countries a bigger choice of suppliers and they could avoid “sham” recyclers and have a cleaner operation

Robin Ingenthron 2011. (*founder and CEO of Vermont-based electronics reuse and recycling company Good Point Recycling. Ingenthron is also the founder of Fair Trade Recycling (WR3A), a cooperative organization promoting best practices in reuse and recycling in emerging markets*) 31 Mar 2011 “Why We Should Ship Our Electronic "Waste" to China and Africa” <https://www.vice.com/en/article/d77w9m/e-waste-recycling-exports-are-good> (accessed 16 May 2022)

Good USA recycling companies, "product stewards", should have exported more product, at least to the legal factories, in order to give the techs of color more choices of supplier. It would have killed the sham recyclers, helped the USA trade deficit, provided leverage to clean up standards at the factories, and lowered the cost of e-recycling to boot. They could have out-marketed the lazy exporters who refused to screen the products they exported. Instead, American environmentalists did the exact opposite. Our best recycling companies refused to export anything. Left with a choice of whether to buy mixed loads from sham recyclers, or to stay barefoot and pregnant in the digital age, my colorful geek friends chose to stay in business.

Banning legit exports of electronic junk shifts it to the black market. Example: California

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The naive image of barefoot primitives caught fire in the American press. With the passage of e-waste law SB20, California went from being the largest used CRT export market in the world to being a giant crunching noise, using taxpayer dollars to pay recyclers to break working equipment. The cost of recycling a monitor in New Jersey fell dramatically as a result – [mob recyclers](http://motherboard.tv/2010/12/16/new-york-s-great-trash-caper--2) filled the shortfall created by California. Junk piled up. And the watchdogs saw this as further fuel for their crusade against the Geeks of Color.

Impact: Turn the harms

Banning exports makes things worse not better for the poor importing countries. Harms get worse post-plan.

5. Environmental harm

Overseas recycling is better for the environment than keeping it in the US

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Americans, meanwhile, are taking our hard assets and are shredding them, eliminating billions of dollars in added value, to protect manufacturing interests in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. This is bad for the environment, as reuse is far better than shredding. The carbon generated to make a computer monitor is more than the carbon used to run it for its intended life.

6. Masking Disadvantage – Distracts us from solving real problems

The real problem in Ghana is recycling of junk cars. Worrying about electronics distracts us from solving the real problem

Adam Minter 2015 (journalist who visited the Agbogbloshie, Ghana e-waste “dump” site) 16 June 2015 “Anatomy of a Myth: the World’s Biggest E-Waste Dump Isn’t.” <https://shanghaiscrap.com/2015/06/anatomy-of-a-myth-the-worlds-biggest-e-waste-dump-isnt/> (accessed 17 May 2022)

Understanding Agbogbloshie as an electronics dump only serves to ensure that far bigger problems – such as what to do with Ghana’s dead cars – won’t get attention. What I fear is that my friends in the media, always looking for an interesting angle on “the tech story” won’t find Agbogbloshie as worthy of their attention if the problem turns out to be Toyotas and Fords, rather than Apples and Dells. If that’s the case, they’ve not only mis-served themselves, but also the good people of Agbogbloshie who are – ostensibly – the reason their workplace is worth photographing in the first place.

7. Mineral mining and its consequences

If you reduce e-waste recycling, you have to increase mining for the raw materials, and that creates even more problems: Environmental harm, violence and conflict

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E-waste, when treated as a waste to be discarded leads to the loss of valuable metals and REEs contained within. Modest recycling rates of metals combined with rising demand for high-tech goods containing them, require increased mining with its associated social, environmental, health, energy, water, and carbon-footprint costs. Mining and metallurgical processes produce significant amounts of waste and constitute one of the biggest challenges to the environment. Additionally, a positive correlation between mining and conflict on a local level has been detected—the historical rise in mineral prices might explain up to 1/4 of the average level of violence across conflict African countries over the same period.