

SA not cashing in on electronic waste

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The electronic-waste industry would need at least four times more recycling centres to cater for the rise in the number of devices and household electrical items that are being discarded regularly in SA, says Keith Anderson, the chairman of the e-Waste Association of SA (eWasa).



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Globally, it is estimated that electronic waste, or e-waste, is worth \$350bn. In 2015, the global volume of e-waste reached 41.8-million tonnes, with 60% coming from household items such as irons, kettles and dishwashers. Technology hardware made up 7%, according to the UN.

According to Anderson, e-waste is growing five times faster than other sources, because more people are buying electronic goods and the lifespan of some items is decreasing. SA's e-waste market is about R3bn.

eWasa has 1,000 collection points for electronic devices and less than 100 recycling centres across the country.

A levy is being proposed on all electrical and electronic products in a bid to manage the disposal of those items when they are defunct and so, limit harm to the environment.

Anderson says the levy is necessary as it will enable the country to set up recycling and refurbishment plants, create jobs

and stimulate local manufacturing.

The materials that can be extracted from e-waste include gold, copper, silver and palladium. But because of the shortage of recycling plants, many discarded items are sold to international companies because it is expensive to refurbish and recycle locally due to the shortage of the required facilities.

Virtually everything can be recycled, says Anderson, but some processes require complex technology that is not available in SA.

But with the levy, companies will have an incentive to set up recycling centres. This will allow the industry to keep the material extracted from the discarded electronic items locally as a secondary raw material, says Anderson.

The industry will submit its e-waste plan to the Department of Environmental Affairs, he says. The department did not respond to *Business Day's* questions.

Wale Arewa, CEO of IT refurbishing and asset recovery company Xperien, says there is not enough awareness about the safe disposal of technology products. To many companies, he says, disposing old electronic hardware means selling them to staff and charity donations. Some of those items do not last long and beneficiaries of those items are not aware of the secured way of disposing of them once they become defunct.

"eWaste has not [seen] the awareness needed. Many companies - and also the government - do not understand the importance of safe disposal, especially computers," says Arewa.

There are about 50 companies offering IT disposal services, but they range from scrap-metal dealers, printer repair and service companies and after-hours services.

Some technology hardware distributors are also venturing into asset disposal to provide end-to-end services to customers, Arewa says.

Until now, the closest regulation has been the e-waste code of ethics, Arewa says. But the IT asset disposal industry will now be regulated by the Protection of Personal Information Act.

Xperien is eyeing growth beyond SA. Most of its clients are in the financial and data management services. It is now targeting the government, especially the health and education departments.

Xperien is in talks with an Indian company in the industry. "We want to grow the company and need a partner."

Source: Business Day