

# Exposing the Fraud: Recycling Programs Gone Wrong



***“Remember, what you toss always ends up somewhere.”***

*– From the Hewlett-Packard website.*

**T**he debate of whether it is better to recycle or remanufacture toner cartridges has raged for years between printer manufacturers and the aftermarket. To the poor people of Guiyu, China, the answer is crystal clear.

Heaps of empty cartridges line the streets and riversides after being scavenged for their toner. Once the toner is swept out by fingers or paintbrushes, the plastic carcasses and other electronic refuse are burned – fouling the air – or discarded along the Lianjiang River. This type of

dumping has rendered the area’s drinking water not potable; the river has 200 times the acceptable levels of acid and 2,400 times acceptable levels of lead.

Many residents have developed respiratory problems. A local school survey found that 100 of the 1,000 students have severe asthma or other respiratory afflictions.

The residents here have to choose between utter poverty and pollution levels akin to poisoning. The net gain for the average laborer? Roughly \$1.50 per day.

Guiyu, China, has become the world’s dumping ground for what is defined as “e-waste.” “Exporting Harm,” a 54-page report issued by the Basel Action



Network (BAN), exposed the environmental horrors in this small town. Toner cartridges comprise a large portion of the town’s problems.

The e-waste comes from familiar places like Los Angeles or Chicago, as identified by tags and plates on some of the debris. How did they end up here? ***Because someone wanted to have them recycled!***

According to the report and videotape from BAN, recycling centers may collect e-trash, but then they become mere distribution centers for exporting the same. According to recycling insiders, about 80 percent of the e-waste collected by recyclers ends up in containers bound for Asia.







“When we released the report in February, we could not find one recycler who did not export all or part of the e-waste collected to Asia,” said Jim Puckett, coordinator of BAN. “And what we found in Asia was a cyber-age nightmare.” This tragedy is compounded by the knowledge that the toner cartridge remanufacturing industry could have given many of those cartridges another life through reuse. Instead, though callous disregard, they have become tools of disaster and devastation.



“We found toner cartridges and printer laser units dumped or being burned in every place imaginable, from riversides, open fields, roadsides and irrigation canals,” said Puckett. “For some reason the cartridges were not recycled. Only the residual toner was being swept out by workers without any



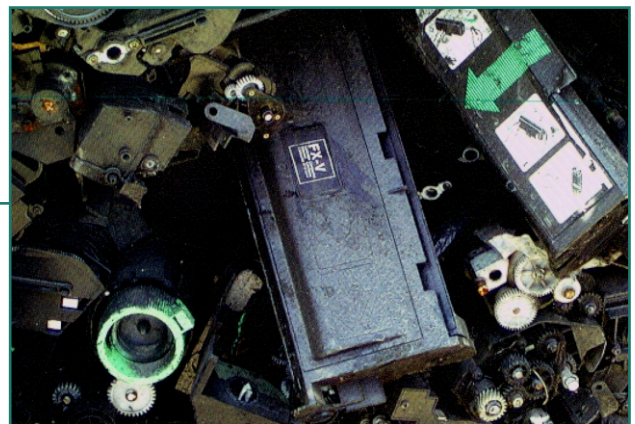
protection whatsoever. The toner billowed around their face and covered their bodies while they worked. The toner contains carbon black, a possible human carcinogen. Manufacturers claim that the toner is a respiratory irritant but not toxic under normal usage. What we witnessed in Guiyu could hardly be called normal exposure.”

What’s worse, is that the waste or unused toner from the cartridges is often used to fill bottles of toner for resale. In shops throughout China, bottles of toner marked as original are for sale to refill cartridges.



This sort of counterfeiting is rampant in Asia and affects aftermarket and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) alike as it is very difficult to compete against these illegitimate products.

The reports of nuclear-winter like conditions in China were reported in the *Hong Kong Post* magazine, and forwarded to International Imaging



Technology Council members by Colin Davison, managing director of Hip Kiu Manufacturing Ltd. of Hong Kong.

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*This article section is from the August 2002 edition of ImageSpectrum Magazine. The full report, “Exporting Harm: The High-Tech Trashing of Asia,” is also at [www.ban.org](http://www.ban.org). Some of the photos in this story are the property of Basel Action Network.*