e-waste menace in India

What is the issue?

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The hazardous e-waste generated is getting accumulated in the country at an alarming pace, causing grave concern for public health and environment.

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How is the e-disposal infrastructure in India?

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- 2 million tonnes of e- waste is generated annually.
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- Just a fraction of it is being disposed off safely.
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- Most of the discarded computers, phones and batteries and age-expired electrical gadgets are sold to junk dealers.
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- They are ultimately recycled in the unorganised sector in a crude and clumsy manner.
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- This causes more harm than the unprocessed items.
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- A sizeable part of the e-waste is mixed with garbage and finds its way to landfill sites.
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- Mumbai tops the list of e-waste generating cities, followed by Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai.
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- India, as a whole, is 3rd in Asia and 5th in the world as an e-waste producer - the others being the US, China, Japan and Germany.
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What are the harmful effects?

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- They contain several hazardous substances, such as mercury, arsenic and other heavy metals.
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- They emit harmful radiation, degrades the soil, and releases toxins to pollute air and ground water.
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- About 40% of lead and 70% of other heavy metals found in landfills are traceable to e-waste.
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- Prolonged exposure to these pollutants can damage the nervous system, kidneys, and brain, and can cause respiratory disorders, lung cancer, skin ailments and other health problems.
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- 2/3rd of the workers in the unorganised e-waste recycling sector suffer from breathing difficulties, coughing, irritation, and other maladies.
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What is the legal framework?

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- The country’s e-waste disposal policy is actually robust.
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- The e-waste management rules, laid down by the environment ministry, even revolve round the judicious concept of “extended producer responsibility” (EPR).
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- Manufacturers are mandated to take back 30% of the discarded electronic equipment for appropriate disposal in the first two years of the enforcement of these rules.
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- This level is to be raised to 70% in the next five years.
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- However, none of this happening due to the lax regulatory infrastructure in the country.
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What should be done?

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- India has a vibrant, informal waste-gathering sector with millions of waste pickers going door-to-door to collect garbage.
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- Industry can use this infrastructure gainfully to retrieve its discarded e-gadgets.
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- Besides, the government, especially the local pollution control boards, needs to consider training the unskilled e-waste recyclers to do their job in a safe and scientific manner.
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- A well-planned integration of the informal and organised waste-processing sectors can help in reducing the menace of e-waste to a perceptible extent.
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Source: Business Standard

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