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The Challenges of E-Waste Management in India: Can India draw lessons from the EU and the USA?

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Summary
This article examines e-waste management in India, identifying lessons and implications from e-waste management in the European Union and the United States which may influence or predict both strengths and obstacles to effectiveness in Indian e-waste regulation. India's new draft E-waste (Management and Handling) Rules are much more comprehensive than any US e-waste regulations and contain several similarities to the EU's current WEEE Directive. The inclusion of the EPR principle and the role of stakeholders in formulating the draft rules are both positive developments that are essential to address the e-waste problem successfully. Once in effect, however, the draft rules are likely to face many of the same obstacles to implementation and enforcement present in the EU and the US. Ultimately, until an international definition of e-waste is in place and the economic causes of illegal e-waste export and handling are addressed in all three entities, enforcing regulatory compliance and eliminating the health and environmental hazards related to e-waste dismantling in India will remain difficult.

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1 Introduction

In recent decades, the use of electronic and electrical devices has increased significantly, leading to rapidly rising amounts of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), often also called e-waste, throughout the world. E-waste is a highly complex waste stream as it contains both very scarce and valuable as well as very toxic components.[1] It also lacks a uniform international definition. In this article, we have chosen to use the terms WEEE and e-waste interchangeably. According to the definition put forth by the Solving the e-Waste Problem (StEP) Initiative, e-waste is

> "a term used to cover almost all types of electrical and electronic equipment that has or could enter the waste stream. Although e-waste is a general term, it can be often considered to cover almost any household or business item with circuitry or electrical components with [a] power or battery supply" (StEP 2009).

[1] E-waste has been dealt with extensively in academic literature. Several studies have examined the regulatory aspects of e-waste. These studies have tended to focus on the regulation in one particular area (e.g. GAO, 2008; Huisman et al., 2007) or compared regulatory mechanisms in a more general manner (e.g. Kahhat et al., 2008).