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# Pocket Information Guide for South African E-Waste Collectors

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Environmental Management System Development:  
Guidelines for SME's in the E-Waste Sector Towards  
a "Light" Implementation Framework, Based on ISO  
14001:2004

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## Project Team

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## Disclaimer

No member of the writing and support team of this guide booklet assumes any personal liability or responsibility for the mismanagement of any portion of e-waste with regards to possible environmental or human health damages as a result of the information provided in this guidebook.

# 1. Welcome

We welcome you to learn more about the responsible handling of e-waste. As a collector of e-waste it is important that you are going about your daily work as efficiently and as safely (for yourself & the environment) as possible. It does not matter how you collect – if you use a trolley, a horse-cart or a bakkie, the same basic rules for the safe and responsible way to collect and transport e-waste to the nearest buyer applies.

This guidebook is suitable for any type of entry level collection operator.

## 2. The Purpose of this Pocket Guide



To provide a framework for good collection practices and what legislation or regulations you need to be aware of so you don't do illegal things for which you could be punished



Minimise environmental pollution



Protect human health



## 3. The A-Z of Words Used in this Guide

**Buyer:**

This would typically be a close-by metal scrap yard or a “buy-back centre” keen to buy a range of recyclables and any other materials or components of financial value. Most times your buyer is acting as a “middle man” for delivering such items to the actual recycler and/or repair shop/refurbisher.

**Collection:**

Gathering of e-waste and/or other waste either by foot or with any type of non-motorised vehicle for the purposes of safely transporting it to a buyer.

**E-Waste Businesses:**

A person or business entity who collects e-waste from the public or from private businesses for the purpose of selling it on.

**E-Waste Collector:**

A person or business entity who collects e-waste from the public or from private businesses for the purpose of selling it on to a legally compliant and licenced processing or recycling facility.

**E-Waste Processor:**

Any, as by law required, “properly licenced and registered” person or business who/that works responsibly with e-waste. This typically involves recovering (through opening and dismantling equipment, either manually or mechanically) both the fractions and components that can be sold on, as well as the toxic (and hence typically valueless) e-waste components that require a safe disposal to landfill to not harm people or the environment.

**E-Waste Recycling:**

Changing the physical or chemical composition of e-waste by crushing, compacting, shredding or refining such wastes and transporting those components to an end-user (such as a refinery, smelter or plastic extrusion company).

**Informal Sector:**

Formed by individuals and their businesses who may both be unregistered and unlicensed. For example, people who do not own any identification documents' do not pay taxes or have any insurance or health cover and typically no other form of health protection. This refers for example to waste pickers on landfills or street/trolley collectors.

**Refurbishing:**

Refurbishment of electronics is the process of certifying the working condition of used electronics. The process will include restoration of the electrical product to its original usable purpose and condition as far as it is possible.



## 4. How to Use this Pocket Information Guide

This guide is put together in a format that allows you to only extract the specific information you are interested in OR to read it page by page.

The “At a Glance” quick orientation table below allows you to see the type of information shared in this pocket guide and with the included checklist, you can also decide immediately if you should read up more about a particular subject.

Checklist of Basic Questions you Need to Ask Yourself First			
Question	Yes	No	See
Do you know what e-waste exactly is?			See Chapter 5 for a description
Do you know the different types of “e-waste” that exist?			See Chapter 5 for a list and description
Do you know if you operate on the right side of the law?			Read explanations in Chapter 6
Are you aware of the potential human health hazards caused by mismanaged e-waste?			Read explanations in Chapter 7
Are you aware of the threats to your health as a result of mismanaged e-waste?			Read explanations in Chapter 7
Do you want tips on how to follow best operational practice at all times?			Read more in Chapters 8 and 11
Do you need any help in sourcing e-waste and finding buyers of e-waste?			See Chapters 9 and 10
Do you plan to cooperate and team-up with other companies and authorities?			See Chapter 12 for a list of established E-Waste businesses

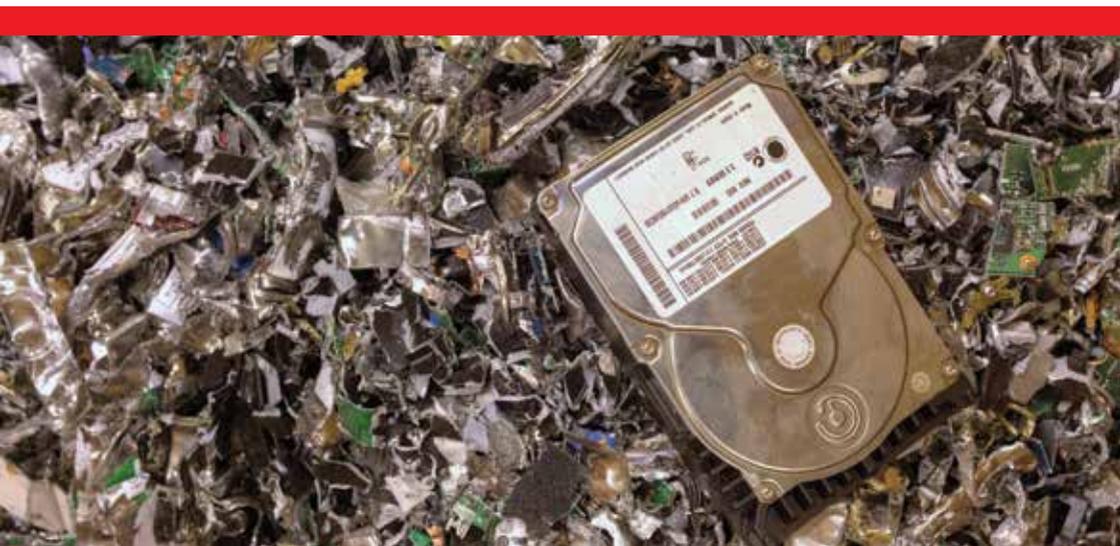
## 5. What Is “E-Waste”?

Waste electrical and electronic equipment (e-waste is also sometimes called WEEE) - is the term used to describe old, end-of-life or discarded appliances using electricity or a battery. It includes (parts of) computers, consumer electronics, fridges etc which have been disposed of by their original users.

E-waste contains both valuable materials and non-valuable/not so valuable materials but ALL materials must be handled responsibly.

### **Danger!**

Some materials built into electronics and then ending up as e-waste are highly hazardous by nature. This is why they require special handling, recycling and disposal methods and which is why YOU must not touch them, extract them or set fire to them. Please protect yourself from any harm and read more about the health and environmental dangers of some e-waste components and materials in Chapter 7.



## 5.1 Types of E-Waste

In Europe there are 10 different types of e-waste separately defined. They term e-waste also as “waste electrical and electronic equipment” (e-waste). The most common ones found in African countries are found in the following 4 categories:

	Category	Items
Most common types of e-waste found in Africa:	Large household appliances	Washing machines, dryers, refrigerators, air-conditioners, vacuum cleaners, etc.
	Small household appliances	Vacuum cleaners, coffee machines, irons, toasters, etc.
	Office, information and communication equipment	PCs, laptops, mobile phones, telephones, fax machines, copiers, printers etc.
	Entertainment and consumer electronics	Televisions, VCR/DVD/CD players, Hi-Fi sets, radios, etc.
To a lesser degree e-waste is also generated in the form of:	Lighting equipment	Fluorescent tubes, sodium lamps etc. (except: bulbs, halogen bulbs)
	Electric and electronic tools	Drills, electric saws, sewing machines, lawn mowers etc. (except: large stationary tools/machines)
	Toys, leisure, sports and recreational equipment	Electric train sets, coin slot machines, treadmills etc.

# 6. E-Waste and the Law

## 6.1 The African Perspective

Due to its potentially hazardous nature e-waste is likely to be considered a hazardous waste in your country. Therefore, the disposal of e-waste as well as its treatment is likely to be legislated (e.g.: through broader environmental protection legislation or even a specific waste legislation) and this means that you have to adhere to such laws in your country.

Especially West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, that receive and trade in a lot of used (second-hand) electronics

(coming from Europe and the US), generate high volumes of e-waste. Therefore, national e-waste strategies have been developed, seeking to prevent e-waste from polluting the environment and people working with it, while also financially benefiting from managing e-waste responsibly.

## 6.2 South African Legislation

### 6.2.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 106 of 1996)

The South African Constitution is the most important legislative document we have, as it gives every South African citizen basic human rights including the right to live in an environment that is not harmful and will be protected for present and future generations through the prevention of any pollution and ecological degradation. Therefore, anyone managing any aspect of waste (including e-waste) must ensure that no harm is caused to people or the environment in the process. It is for example **highly illegal** for anyone to burn any part of e-waste (such as cables, plastic casings), as this creates very toxic smoke. Read more about the dangers of e-waste to you and the environment in Chapter 7.

### 6.2.2 The National Environmental Management: Waste Act (Act 59 of 2008)

The Waste Act has been in force since 2009 and regulates and controls the management of all waste including e-waste. Before the Waste Act was developed, there was no specific law to regulate waste. As a result, bad waste management often took place by irresponsible individuals, leading to personal health problems and environmental pollution from burning and dumping of waste.

The Waste Act has been developed to change that. To this end, large, formal waste operators need to be registered so that the government can keep track on the waste volumes and waste types (including e-waste) handled, recycled and disposed of by the South African waste management industry. E-waste is included within the definition of

*hazardous* waste in the Waste Act due to its potential hazardous nature (when not handled properly or not handled at all). Therefore, certain activities are “listed” and require a special waste management licence.

*If I start a small collection business, do I trigger listed activities?*

Collection activities currently do not trigger national legislation in terms of the Waste Act; however local municipalities may require a collection business to register with the municipality in terms of the service being offered. If you operate your entrepreneurial collection activities with the aid of only a trolley or one small bakkie to transport any e-waste, you probably do not need a licence. Government has realised that there are small scale initiatives that, if managed correctly, will not have a negative impact on human health or the environment and has therefore developed **thresholds**.

Thresholds are set limits that will determine if a waste management licence is required. In other words, if you engage in ANY other e-waste handling activity (such as (temporary) storage or sorting and baling of e-waste or components thereof) in ADDITION to your standard “**collection and transport to buyer activities**” and you exceed one of those thresholds, you WILL need to apply for a waste management licence in order to continue your collection business.

*Let's look briefly at the thresholds for the listed activities that ALL require licences:*

By law you are NOT allowed to **store** in excess of 35 m<sup>3</sup> waste at any time or **sort/bale** more than 500 kg per day without a licence.

That sounds like a lot but don't be fooled – it is not much more than the equivalent of a shipping container full of material stored or handling in any way the equivalent 40 computer monitors or 15 fridges per day.

So it really is BEST PRACTICE to not even consider doing anything else with the e-waste you find and collect other than to bring it straight-away and “as you find it” to a licenced larger buyer who can then further legally process and/or recycle the e-waste you bring him.

## 6.3 The Second-Hand Goods Act

### What are “Second-Hand Goods”?

Second-hand or “used” goods are what you had to buy or might have received for free from the original owner (such as still functional electronics) as part of your collection. This makes you a “second-hand user”.

There is a law in South Africa that is called the *Second-Hand Goods Act*. It has been developed to fight the theft and resulting illegal sales of stolen items. Among other things, the Act requires all dealers in- and buyers of YOUR second-hand goods to report to the police all suspicious transactions where the seller (that would be YOU) attempts to provide false particulars (e.g.: if you try to hide or fake your identity), or where the goods are suspected to be stolen or tampered with.

The Act holds people who buy stolen goods as liable by the law as those who stole the goods, therefore if your buyer is a licenced e-waste processor or recycler, they will by law have to ask and to know where the e-waste you brought in comes from. Anyone from whom YOU receive e-waste (no matter if by individual households or businesses) must ALL issue you with their full address details (e.g.: through a copy of an ID) and a confirmation of original ownership and you have to pass this information on to the person/business you sell on the e-waste and any related fractions to.

A legally compliant e-waste processor or recycler will **always** have to ask you for and record:

- the identity and particulars of all previous owners of the e-waste delivered to him
- the weight and (in most cases) also the type and numbers of units of e-waste delivered
- your signature on delivery
- your name and identity number and possibly your residential address
- a copy of identity document or passport.

NOTE: By law and as specified in the Second-Hand Goods Act, the buying, possession and disposal of burnt cable is a criminal offence that is punishable with severe sentences including prison for ANYONE involved. The next page shows an example of a form you could use as a collector to capture such information.

**E-Waste Collection Form**

Phone/Cell number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Where did your E-Waste come from?**

(please make a cross in the relevant box):

Household

Business

Other: (please explain)

Please Describe the Equipment Handed Over*			
Type of E-Waste (PC, cell phone, etc.)	Age	Status (broken/working)	Serial number of equipment handed over (if relevant/available)

I hereby confirm that the electronic waste handed over to (name of the collector) \_\_\_\_\_ is personally owned by myself and/or the business I represent:

Signed at: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Waste Donor: \_\_\_\_\_

Confirmation of receipt: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature E-Waste collector: \_\_\_\_\_

\*A copy of this e-waste collection form should be given to the e-waste doner

## 7. The Dangers of E-Waste to your Health and the Environment

The problem with e-waste is that it is made of many different metals and plastics. Some of them are dangerous and certain (informal) “recycling” processes (including smashing, crushing, burning and melting of components) are likely to release harmful fumes or dust that, when emitted or leached into the soil, can have harmful health and environmental impacts. Moreover, informal recycling such as breaking apart equipment to recover metals is often done at or near waste dumps or on open grounds next to unscrupulous scrap metal yards where there is no ground water protection. So if parts are dumped in the open ground, the next rain washes toxic chemicals into the soil, rivers and storm water drains.

Where poisonous chemicals and metals like lead are escaping into the ground, drinking water will become too dangerous to drink...

When poisonous chemicals such as highly toxic plastics (PVC cables and computer casings containing toxic flame protectors) are burnt in an open flame, you can get asthma or even cancer and innocent children, people and animals in the area get very sick. Since open fires burn at a relatively low temperature (compared to a controlled and contained incineration process), they release much more pollutants, poisoning people and the environment alike.



The table below gives you an idea about the chemicals and metals you really need to avoid getting in contact with:

Hazardous (hence now restricted) substances	Where to be found?	How are they released?	Why dangerous?
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heating up solder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heavy metal that accumulates in body tissue through unprotected contact</li> <li>Kidney damage</li> </ul>
Cadmium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contacts</li> <li>Colouring of plastic casing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burning/heat treatment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brain damage – even death</li> </ul>
Mercury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Switches</li> <li>Sensors</li> <li>Contacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heat treatment</li> <li>Shredding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nerve toxin, deadly in small doses</li> <li>Severe polluter of water, soil, air</li> </ul>
Hexavalent Chromium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plating</li> <li>Anti-corrosion agent</li> <li>Pigment in plastics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plating</li> <li>Melting</li> <li>Burning plastic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Causes cancer</li> </ul>
Flameretardends: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Polychlorinated biphenyls</li> <li>Polychlorinated diphenyl-ethers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plastic casing and housing</li> <li>Plastic wiring and cables</li> <li>Printed wire boards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Melting</li> <li>Burning plastics</li> <li>Shredding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Causes cancer</li> </ul>

### Some First Aid and Health Tips:

- Keep a basic first aid kit including bandages, plasters, disinfectant etc. on you to be able to respond to smaller accidents.
- In the case of an emergency, try to determine what the person was exposed to (smoke, poisonous water, a physical injury caused by dropping e-waste during transport).
- Establish what part of the body was affected before you take action.
- If the person is unconscious, has trouble breathing, or is having convulsions, give needed first aid immediately.
- Call 112 on your cell phone or 10111 on a landline for an emergency service.

## 8. Best E-Waste Management Practices for an E-Waste Collector

As a responsible collector of e-waste it is important that you safe-keep and secure all materials that you collect from the moment you receive them to when you sell them on. That means that at no time and through none of your activities involved in your collection efforts, someone (you or other humans) or something (nature including plants and animals) must get harmed in any way.

This Chapter describes how all aspects of collection operations should be done including:

- the actual collection of e-waste
- handling of e-waste, preparation for transport to a licenced and authorised e-waste processor
- documenting the receipt and delivery of e-waste.

### 8.1 Collection

As a waste collector you probably not only come across e-waste in isolation but rather find certain e-waste pieces as you go along collecting other recyclables such a paper, plastic bottles and beverage cans etc. As a rule of thumb – due to its potential hazardous nature you should:

- **never** mix e-waste with other types of waste within the same container or receptacles that you use for the collection and transport of your waste
- have a dedicated section in your bakkie, on your cart or push trolley where such materials can be placed safely.

As a collector of e-waste materials, you will be likely to end up with some items that are by definition not e-waste (see also Chapter 5) but that you are likely to frequently co-collect nevertheless.

Such items include:

- packaging waste (often e-waste and components are still packed up)
- peripherals (those are items such as CD ROMs and tapes that are still stuck in electronics)
- empty plastic casings and broken pieces of plastics, glass etc.

Being a responsible collector, it is important that you take care of those materials too. Ideally you find a buyer for packaging waste but if not, it is STILL your duty to dispose of any remaining waste responsibly. You can for example utilise one of the many municipal drop-off sites that are available for free or go directly to a landfill site that normally allows free disposal of smaller waste loads (check with your local municipality about what is accepted in your area).

Another very important thing to keep in mind: make sure that what you plan to collect will actually be bought by someone and that there is a stable buyers market for the items you collect:

- The buyer should offer you a price for your e-waste that is fair.
- The buyer needs to be committed to a long-term buying relationship (not just a once-off interest).
- The buyer needs to run a licenced and registered operation.
- The buyer must not break the law in any way (e.g.: by burning cables or dumping toxic e-waste components). If you know about such practices but you choose NOT to tell authorities, you could also be implicated in an arrest as a “supplier” of such material.

## 8.2 Handling

All handling of e-waste, including the loading, unloading and actual transport, needs to be carried out with appropriate tools, containers and fixings to avoid damage to e-waste, so that subsequent repair for reuse, refurbishment or recovery of materials through dismantling is possible through a licenced, legally fully compliant, specialised processor.

At all times you need to keep the handling area AND any surrounding area clean. This includes regular clean-ups around your e-waste and picking up any litter you cause outside the site.

Glass containing components such as CRT display appliances, flat panel displays and lamps need to be handled carefully so that they do not break.

Crushing or compacting of any e-waste prior to the treatment is not permitted.

### Highly Recommended

A free internet based e-waste management training course.

If you have access to the internet and an email address, you can learn all about best e-waste management practices at [www.recycling-trainer.eu](http://www.recycling-trainer.eu).

Simply sign up and listen and learn by watching how e-waste needs to be handled properly step-by-step!



## 8.3 Documenting the Receipt and Delivery of E-Waste

### Basic Administration and Data Capturing for Yourself

The idea of starting your own e-waste collection operation is to make money. As an entrepreneur you will have to earn your own salary and therefore you have to become immediately aware when there is a problem in the way you do things. The truth is that “YOU CANNOT MANAGE WHAT YOU DO NOT MEASURE”.

For this reason, any collection entrepreneur striving for a professional operation of his/her business should keep a daily record of:

- the quantity of e-waste received
- its origin
- the quantity of e-waste sorted
- the quantity of e-waste sold to a buyer (including total income derived from it).

## 9. Sourcing E-Waste – Where is it Hiding?

Don't get started unless you have safely established that there is sufficient e-waste in the area you want to work in. There are various potential ways to get access to e-waste. As a lawful collector who is committed to NOT break the law you will never threaten your health or the health of the environment by engaging in unauthorised activities such as burning parts, stripping and cannibalising equipment for selected items only to leave the rest behind. Hence you need to be able to provide some assurance to prospective clients ready to release e-waste to you that your service is limited ONLY to sourcing and then supplying e-waste items to the properly licenced recyclers. There are various strategies you can follow to access sources of e-waste:

- You can encourage households and businesses to bring their e-waste to you.
- You can chose to go from door to door and offer your collection services to households (it is a well known fact that many people hold on to a lot of e-waste).
- You could approach businesses in the area and ask for their e-waste. If you manage to establish a quality partnership, you are likely to obtain the best quality and largest amounts of e-waste on a regular basis.

**However be warned:** Businesses are typically very hesitant to release e-waste unless you can provide a guarantee that it is handled with the best care and they know where it ends up. You might therefore want to obtain an official letter from your buyers, which are either “middlemen” (such as properly licensed large scale collectors/transporters) themselves or actually the final e-waste processing/ recycling destination. Refer to Chapter 10 for a list of potential buyers that might want to establish a more formal working relationship with you.



## 10. Potential Partners, Buyers and Further Advice

Below is a link to the E-Waste Association South Africa (eWASA) – a non-profit organisation that has been working with manufacturers, vendors and distributors of electronic and electrical goods and e-waste handlers (including refurbishers, dismantlers and recyclers) to manage e-waste effectively since 2008. eWASA is regularly updating its list of e-waste operators. The contacts contained therein are for Southern Africa and (where applicable) are split up into three categories namely:

- Collection sites
- Recyclers
- Refurbishers

As prices as well as the demand for certain materials can vary on a day to day basis, it is not possible to specify the exact types and prices of e-waste that they might want to buy from you.

Also note that such high-end users and recyclers such as DESCO and eCycle will likely take a very careful look at your business practice as part of their own quality insurance/environmental management systems, which requires that stringent controls are in place for key suppliers.

If you mistreat e-waste before you bring it to them and they find out about it, they will in all likelihood NOT uphold any business relationship with you. It might take you longer but it will definitely pay off to do the right thing as a collection entrepreneur.

For potential buyers please check out the very comprehensive list of eWASA accredited AND (not yet) accredited collection sites, recyclers and refurbishers: [www.ewasa.org](http://www.ewasa.org) (scroll down on the “Recycling” tab).



# 11. The Next Step

## 11.1 Getting your Business Registered as a Formal Waste Operator

As your collection business grows and prospers, so do your responsibilities to stay legally compliant. At some point you might decide to expand your operations to “listed activities”, i.e. activities on permanent operational sites which do IMMEDIATELY require legal permission documents such as a waste management licence (read more about it in Chapter 6) and a basic or full Environmental Impact Assessment.

**WARNING:** If you illegally operate without a waste management licence and are found out, you will be shut down and likely heavily fined for this transgression.

To comply with the by-laws of various municipalities and other waste legislation, it might be a requirement for you as a waste management operator to REGISTER yourself as a formal e-waste business. The National Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) currently does NOT require any collectors or transporters to register with the South African Waste Information Centre (SAWIC) BUT you will have to register your business instead through a provincial Waste Information System (the latter currently only exists for the Gauteng and Western Cape Province) as soon as it is a formal business structure with a sizable fleet of vehicles and permanent storage and handling areas (see also section below for registration documents required in that case).

Core waste management activities that must be registered are:

- Storage
- Recycling and recovery of waste
- Treatment of waste
- Disposal of waste

Go to [www.sawic.org.za](http://www.sawic.org.za) for more information!

Also: contact your local municipality for more/additional information they might require so you are e-waste compliant!

## 12. References

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