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DEPARTMENTS

Tuesday, March 6, 2007

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BRIEFING CENTER

## Microsoft, Ericsson, Philips join UN global recycling scheme

By Peter Clarke  
[Electronics Supply & Manufacturing](#)  
(03/05/2007 9:07 AM EST)

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Leading high-tech companies including Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Dell, Ericsson and Philips and Cisco Systems have joined a United Nations initiative that aims to harmonize world policy and legislative approaches to electronic recycling and to standardize recycling processes.

Such processes could impact the design of ICs, packaging and equipment to better support reuse and recycling as well as stricter rules on the disposal of electronics.

The initiative, called "Solving the E-Waste Problem" (StEP), includes leading electronics companies, government agencies, international organizations, NGOs and academic institutions from around the world, along with recycling and refurbishing companies as charter members. The StEP initiative is expected to be officially launched Wednesday (March 7).

Part of the StEP thesis is that electronic equipment donated to developing countries is often unusable there and becomes part of an expensive flow of material sent for illegal disposal.

When electronic scrap in developing countries is incinerated, it not only wastes resources, but adds toxic chemicals to the environment, both local and global, according to StEP.

"This partnership is committed to salvaging these increasingly precious resources and preventing them from fouling the environment," said Ruediger Kuehr of the United Nations University, which will host the StEP Secretariat in Bonn, Germany, in a statement.

The "junkyard" deconstruction and disposal of electronics waste is becoming usual in many developing countries and this can lead to emissions of toxic substances such as dioxins, furans and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, caused by burning PVC plastic and wire insulation.

There can also be soil and water [contamination](#) from chemicals such as: brominated flame retardants polychlorinated biphenyls in transformers and capacitors; and lead, mercury, cadmium, zinc, chromium and other heavy metals.

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