



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the causes behind India's problem of e-waste and reasons due to which rules have been ineffective. (250 words)

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Approach:

- Introduce briefly e-waste problem through relevant facts.
- Enumerate causes of e-waste.
- Describe the reasons for the failures of e-waste guidelines to control the problem.

Answer:

Introduction

- The **Global E-waste Monitor 2017** by the United Nations University, states that India generates about 2 million tonnes of e-waste annually and ranks fifth among e-waste producing countries, after the US, China, Japan and Germany.
- **E-Waste Management Rules, 2016**, provides that manufacturers of electric and electronic equipments must facilitate their collection and return it to authorized dismantlers or recyclers. However, there is little evidence that it is being implemented.

Causes of E-waste

- **Domestic use:** The decline in cost of consumer electronics, rise in middle-class incomes, and the increase in frequency at which devices are discarded. India has emerged as second largest mobile phone market which has created major problem for management of e-waste.
- **Illegal Import:** Hazardous and illegal e-waste is imported from developed countries under the garb of recycling. However, due to lack of monitoring there is no way to ensure imported material is sent back. A 2015 report by the United Nations Environment Programme says that China, India, Malaysia and Pakistan are the main destinations for large-scale shipments of hazardous wastes, including e-waste, in Asia.
- **Infrastructure problem:** Shortage of Institutional infrastructures, including e-waste collection, transportation, treatment, storage, recovery and disposal, need to be established, at national and/or regional levels for the environmentally sound management of e-waste
- **Informal and Unscientific approach:** Over 95 per cent of e-waste recycling is done by the informal sector through unscientific methods to recycle e-waste.

Reasons for ineffectiveness of rules:

- **Failure in implementation** of E-Waste (Management) Rules due to shortage of personnel in state and central pollution board.
- Rules allow for refurbishing of imported second-hand products. However the nodal agency, the Central Board of Excise and Customs, **lacks the human resource and the infrastructure** to distinguish between a second-hand product and e-waste.
- There are **grey areas in the rules** as there is no mechanism to check whether products imported

for refurbishing have been re-exported or not. Even if a fraud is detected the law is silent on the penal clause.

- The rules provide that the responsibility of producers is not confined to waste collection, but also to ensure that the waste reaches the authorised recycler/dismantler. But the annual returns filed by the producers are silent on this. Since there is **no monitoring system**, there is no guarantee that the waste collected by producers does not go to unauthorised recyclers.
- **Lack of awareness:** There is the general lack of awareness about e-waste and rules governing their management. A 2015 survey by Toxic Links found that only 50 per cent people interviewed were “acquainted with the term e-waste”. Those interviewed were residents of India’s top 5 e-waste generating cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and Bengaluru.

Conclusion

- E-waste when dismantled and disposed unscientifically release extremely harmful gases or large particulates into environment causing hazardous air pollution causing severe health hazards.
- Thus there is need to implement the E-waste management rules 2016 effectively and deal with the problem of e-waste more holistically with proper monitoring mechanisms in place.

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