

CUT community learns more about e-waste

The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) recently hosted a public lecture on e-waste management to educate and inform its community on the best ways to dispose e-waste material and contribute to a cleaner and greener environment.



Ulze van Wyk, MD of Africa e-Waste Solutions

E-waste is an emerging issue, driven by the rapidly increasing quantities of complex end-of-life electronic equipment. The global level of production, consumption and recycling induces large flows of both toxic and valuable substances.

Electronic waste or e-waste refers to broken and unwanted electrical or electronic devices peripherals such as computers, monitors, printers, batteries, mobile phones, televisions, lamps and others, which are destined for reuse, resale, salvage, recycling, or disposal. E-waste mismanagement and its toxicity can lead to adverse human health effects and environmental pollution if disposed of incorrectly as there are more than 1,000 different harmful materials in e-waste products.

Sustainability framework at CUT

In his welcome address, Professor Alfred Ngowi, acting DVC: research, innovation and engagements, mentioned that CUT initiated a sustainability framework that took a holistic account of issues that form components of sustainability. He said some activities are either affecting sustainability in a negative way or promoting it. "Disposal of e-waste raises serious environmental and health issues as recycling e-waste is not just a viable solution to eliminate the harmful effects of e-waste disposal, but a sound business proposition in itself. Although e-waste looks like a simple task of throwing what you do not want in your domestic bin, in reality, it is a worrying issue. If we have to go into details of how the process is done, it is then that we will realise that there are very disastrous materials which are exposed to the environment, as a result, disposal of e-waste is a specialised field and unfortunately, most of us are not aware of it," he said.

Toxic components

In her presentation, Ulze van Wyk, MD of Africa e-Waste Solutions, elaborated in detail about the importance of e-waste disposal. She also mentioned that the main reason for e-waste to be deemed toxic is due to the components found in them such as bromine, chlorine, mercury lead and arsenic. "When the incorrect disposal of material is dumped, it gets exposed to sun heat and rain, then the toxic component leaks into the ground causing the environment to be toxic and that can ultimately lead to death. One battery or mobile phone in the bin could spell disaster for the fragile ecosystem and pollute

deep into the ground, poisoning our water supplies.”

She also mentioned poverty as one of the main challenges and factors that drive people to get involved in illegal businesses of e-waste material disposal. “What we must know is that the unemployment rate is high and many people wake up in the morning with an urge to provide for their families. A quick solution to their problems is this e-waste material because it consists of gold, silver, copper, aluminium and steel, which are sellable. They extract these minerals and steal from waste material, burn e-waste material and inhale all the toxins then die after two to three years. We need to incorporate these guys and show them a healthy, legal and environmentally friendly way of doing it. We need to incorporate their needs into the environment needs so that everything works together,” she said.

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