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Report calls for alliance to solve escalating global health emergency threat posed to millions by open dumpsites

- Open dumpsites receive roughly 40% of the world's waste and serve about 3.5 to 4 billion people¹
- Substantial rise in unregulated dumping of mobile devices, electronic appliances, medical and municipal waste accelerating scale of the threat and health risks¹
- Uncontrolled burning of waste releases gases and toxins into the atmosphere
- Open waste sites in India, Indonesia and the Philippines more detrimental to life expectancy than malaria²
- 64 million people's lives affected by world's 50 largest dumpsites (equal to population of France)¹
- In addition to human/environmental impact, the financial cost of open dumpsites runs into the tens of billions \$USD³

A new report presented at the ISWA World Congress today has revealed the global health emergency already affecting tens of millions of people worldwide is escalating in scale and impact. The report, published by the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) entitled '*Wasted health, the tragic case of open dumpsites*', demonstrates how the problems of open dumpsites experienced in the developed world 40 years ago still exist in poor and emerging countries but are being additionally compounded by unprecedented new issues. These include the unregulated accumulation on a massive scale of discarded electronic and mobile devices, medical waste, and animal carcasses, which are routinely burnt.

While the risk of disease and illness to millions of people living in the immediate vicinity of open dumpsites is cause for concern in its own right, the impact of the gases and toxins being released into the atmosphere by burning the waste has global consequences. The report concludes that without a

coordinated response to the issue through a global alliance of organisations capable of delivering real change, the problem will only worsen and quickly.

David Newman, ISWA President, said: “The recommendations of this report are clear: the international community has an urgent task ahead in closing waste dumps globally, for the sake of populations affected by them, because they live in or near them, but also because all the world’s people are breathing in the toxins released by burning on open dumps. And the greenhouse gas emissions involved are huge too, and unless we act, the growth of open dumping is inevitable.”

Research has already proven that exposure to open dumpsites has a greater detrimental impact on a population’s life expectancy than malaria. Researchers analysed 373 toxic waste sites in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, where an estimated 8.6 million people are at risk of exposure to lead, asbestos, hexavalent chromium and other hazardous materials. Among those people at risk, the exposure could cause a loss of around 829,000 years of good health as a result of disease, disability or early death. By comparison, malaria in these countries, whose combined population is nearly 1.6 billion, causes the loss of 725,000 healthy years.

In addition to the dangers associated with traditional municipal waste, the ever increasing number of discarded ‘e-waste’, mobile phone, mobile devices, and PCs for example, is adding a further threat. According to STEP initiative⁴, over 42million tonnes of e-waste was generated in 2014 and due to lack of facilities, high labour costs, and tough environmental regulations, developed countries have only recently begun to recycle E-waste as EPR systems have been implemented in Europe and elsewhere. The result is that a significant proportion of e-waste is exported to open dumpsites in countries where regulations are not as strict.

With growing income/capita and populations in those developing or poor countries, the amount of e-waste generated domestically is also increasing and being mixed with municipal, industrial and hazardous waste.

However, it is also the differing types of disposal which are creating risks locally and globally. Local health risks from open burning associated with dumpsites are related to their emissions, which usually involve dangerous pollutants, heavy metals, volatile compounds and soot. The actual health risks depend on the practices followed and on the type of the waste disposed of in each dumpsite, as well

as on the environmental and social conditions of the area. Open burning and animal feeding increase the health risks substantially, the first by direct emissions of dangerous pollutants into the atmosphere and the second by transferring the pollutants to the food chain.

Antonios Mavropoulos, Chairman of the ISWA Scientific and Technical Committee and author of the report, is calling for immediate action: “Little or no coordinated action is being taken at present and to be effective change can only happen if there is a global alliance to address the issue among governments and key stakeholder organisations. We need to start with a plan of how we finance the closure and relocation of the most dangerous sites urgently and provide support through resources of capital and expertise. While the cost will be substantial, it represents an opportunity to invest in the infrastructure and economy of these emerging and poor nations. In addition, the outlay required to close the most risky dumpsites will be just a small fraction of the cost of their health impacts.”

David Newman added: “ISWA and its experts are willing to take part in this global clean up and will, with other interested parties, collaborate on drawing attention to the damage caused to human health through poor waste management practices.”

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References

¹Waste Atlas Report, The World’s 50 biggest dumpsites, 2014 <http://www.atlas.d-waste.com/Documents/Waste-Atlas-report-2014-webEdition.pdf>

²Burden of Disease from Toxic Waste Sites in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines in 2010 <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/wp-content/uploads/121/7/ehp.1206127.pdf>

³The potential monetary benefits of reclaiming hazardous waste sites in the Campania region: an economic evaluation, environmental Health 2009 <http://www.ehjournal.net/content/8/1/28>

⁴STEP (Solving The E-waste Problem) initiative <http://www.step-initiative.org/overview-world.html>

Note to editors

Interviews with David Newman, President of the International Solid Waste Association and Chairman Antonios Mavropoulos can be arranged on request. Please contact Marnie Bradford (mbradford@cjam.co.uk) or Jason Simms (jsimms@cjam.co.uk) on 01787 221027.

About ISWA

ISWA is the world's leading independent waste management association with members in more than 100 countries. ISWA's declared mission is:

- To Promote and Develop Sustainable and Professional Waste Management Worldwide

ISWA achieves its mission through:

- Promoting resource efficiency through sustainable production and consumption
- Support to developing and emerging economies
- Advancement of waste management through education and training
- Promoting appropriate and best available technologies and practices
- Professionalism through its programme on professional qualifications