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Exposing the Fraud: Recycling Programs Gone Wrong

"Remember, what you toss always ends up somewhere."

— From the Hewlett Packard website.

The debate of whether it is better to recycle or remanufacture toner cartridges has raged for years between printer manufacturers and the aftermarket. To the poor people of Guiyu, China, the answer is crystal clear.

Heaps of empty cartridges line the streets and riversides after being scavenged for their toner. Once the toner is swept out by fingers or paintbrushes, the plastic carcasses

and other electronic refuse are burned — fouling the air — or discarded along the Lianjiang River. This type of dumping has rendered the area's drinking water not potable; the river has 200 times the acceptable levels of acid and 2,400 times acceptable levels of lead.

Many residents have developed respiratory problems. A local school survey found that 100 of the 1,000 students have severe asthma or other respiratory afflictions.

The residents here have to choose between utter poverty and pollution levels akin to

poisoning. The net gain for the average laborer? Roughly \$1.50 per day.

Guiyu, China, has become the world's dumping ground for what is defined as "e-waste." "Exporting Harm," a 54-page report issued by the Basel Action Network (BAN),

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Smoke rises from burn sites along the river.



More cartridge cases awaiting incineration.



Lexmark cartridge dumped for burning.

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Even if only one third of this story about the dumping of cartridges and related material is true, this is a very compelling reason to at least consider remanufacturing.

"As you reach some of the smaller villages before Guiyu, you begin to see the evidence of the deadly business. The car has to negotiate the piles of computer cases, printer circuit boards, copier and printer cases, and laser printer cartridges blocking the road. Houses and courtyards are also piled high with rubbish and waste.

"When you reach Guiyu, there are higher stacks of laser printer cartridges and beyond that near a retaining wall are masses of broken cartridges waiting to be burned. These cartridges are just waiting for their turn to be burned.

Many companies with good intentions return their cartridges to the manufacturer or their supplier in the mistaken belief that they will be reused completely or in part. Sadly this is often not the case and often cartridges are simply shipped offshore to locations like the ones shown here.

This tragedy is compounded by the knowledge that the toner cartridge remanufacturing industry could have given many of those cartridges another life through reuse. Instead, through callous disregard, they have become tools of disaster and devastation.

"We found toner cartridges and printer laser units dumped or being burned in every place imaginable, from riversides,

