

## Media communiqué

Duebendorf, St. Gall, Thun, 21<sup>st</sup> August 2009

### Agreement between Switzerland and Peru signed

## E-waste disposal to be environmentally friendly and create jobs

**Switzerland plays a pioneering role in many areas of environmental protection, including the disposal and recycling of electrical and electronic waste. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, SECO, and Empa have together for several years been active in encouraging and supporting the disposal of electronic and electrical waste in developing countries in an environmentally friendly and resource-saving manner. On August 21<sup>st</sup> 2009 the Environment Minister of Peru, Antonio Brack, and Switzerland's Finance Minister, Doris Leuthard, put their signatures to an agreement to regulate cooperation between the two countries in this area.**

In parallel with a similar scheme already in place in Columbia, SECO intends over the next two and a half years to support various partners from both the private and public sectors in Peru in establishing environmentally friendly systems for recycling electronic and electrical waste (e-waste). The project has been initiated within the framework of SECO's strategy of increasing cooperation with Peru (which it has designated a country of major focus) to the tune of CHF 15 million annually in the medium term. The emphasis will fall in particular on encouraging environmental technologies and supporting climate protection measures. The scheme will be led by Empa, which has already established various projects in the environmental technology field in Columbia and Peru.

One aim of the agreed cooperative work is to minimize the release of possible toxic substances from batteries, insulating material or monitors found in the waste material due to inappropriate handling, thus protecting the health of the workers involved and the local environment. In addition, the process of recycling e-waste offers new business opportunities and creates valuable jobs in the areas of the recovery and reuse of the valuable materials which it contains. The work will be accompanied by various research projects to investigate specific local circumstances in both countries and identify suitable recycling techniques (see the Factsheet). The agreement was signed by Swiss Federal Councilor and Finance Minister Doris Leuthard and the Peruvian Environment Minister Antonio Brack during the course of the latter's recent visit to Switzerland. Minister Brack also seized the opportunity to learn about Empa's latest research and development projects in the fields of efficient resource utilization and life cycle analysis, one example being a current study to evaluate the potential of and conduct life cycles analyses on Peruvian biofuels. "What Empa is doing in the field of biofuels in Peru – namely establishing a scientific basis on which to make political decisions – is of extreme importance to us," was Brack's impressed comment.

### **Focus on recuperating valuable materials and reducing the ecological burden**

The recuperation of valuable materials such as the precious metals used in the manufacture of printed circuit boards offers the possibility of building up international business and trade relationships. As is already the case in China, India and South Africa, the organizations responsible for running the Swiss e-waste recycling system (primarily SWICO Recycling and SENS but also including internationally active Swiss recycling firms) are also involved in the project. That the measures taken in Peru will also strengthen worldwide technology transfer efforts is guaranteed by «StEP – Solving the e-Waste Problem», an international platform in which various UN bodies, multinational concerns (such as HP, Dell, CISCO and Microsoft) and research institutions and administrative offices participate. SECO and Empa, both founder organizations of the platform, are of course also active in StEP.

### **More and more electronic goods being sold in developing countries too**

OECD statistics show that as long ago as 2004 the global trade in goods relating to the information and communication technologies grew to 8% of the combined gross national products of all the countries in the world. The market penetration of the most modern technologies has of course also not simply stopped at the borders of the developing regions either. It is estimated, for instance, that in Latin America, the volume of trade in these branches will more than double within the next five years.

Despite international agreements such as the Basel Convention, which forbid the export of such e-waste, it is not always possible for customs authorities to determine if electrical and electronic devices are being imported as waste or for genuine reuse. Although on the one hand devices such as computers are often repaired and reused effectively in developing countries (thereby helping to provide disadvantaged population groups with access to international knowledge networks), on the other hand they frequently end up as uncontrolled waste in backyards in large cities. In addition, the reintegration of such devices into the added value chain through recycling and repair is often undertaken by the informal, non-professional sector. This is generally an inefficient process associated with the supplementary danger that the release of toxic substances from the e-waste through incorrect handling frequently pollutes the local environment and damages the health of the workers involved.

### **Empa has extensive know-how on e-waste recycling techniques**

Since 2003 SECO has been financially supporting activities involving international scientific partnerships with China, India and South Africa. Empa, which has many years of experience in the application of environmentally friendly recycling techniques thanks to its participation in many related research projects as well as its activities in the technical control of the Swiss e-waste recycling industry, is responsible for leading these projects and ensuring that they are carried out as planned. “The scarcity and finite nature of many materials is made clear to our society through our relationship to electrical and electronic devices. A large range of chemical elements is used in their manufacture and this forces us to deal with the problems caused by the disposal of e-waste,” comments Project Leader Heinz Boeni, head of the Empa’s «sustec – sustainable technology cooperation» group.

For further information on the topic of Sustainable technology cooperation see [www.empa.ch/sustec](http://www.empa.ch/sustec) on e-Waste see [www.ewasteguide.info](http://www.ewasteguide.info) and on Life cycle assessment and modelling see [www.empa.ch/lca](http://www.empa.ch/lca)

### **R'09 and World Resources Forum in Davos – also on the topic of e-waste**

From September 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> specialists on resource issues from all over the world will meet in Davos, Switzerland and Nagoya, Japan, for the «R'09 Twin World Congress» ([www.r2009.org](http://www.r2009.org)) and for the first World Resources Forum ([www.worldresourcesforum.org](http://www.worldresourcesforum.org)). Both events are being co-organized by Empa. In order to minimize the number of intercontinental air journeys by participants (the main source of environmental burden caused by scientific congresses) the meeting will take place concurrently in Europe and Japan, with the two venues being linked to each other in real time by a videoconferencing system. This allows participants to experience presentations (and also informal meetings in the lounge) interactively and in real time at both locations. E-waste is an important concern in Davos and Nagoya, alongside such themes as resources productivity, energy efficiency, material flows, recycling and life cycle analysis (of biofuels, for instance).

### **Further information**

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Swiss Federal Councilor and Finance Minister Doris Leuthard and the Peruvian Environment Minister Antonio Brack signed an agreement to establish sustainable recycling systems for electrical and electronic waste during the Annual Conference on Development Cooperation organized by DEZA (the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) and SECO on the topic “Climate Change and Development” held in Zurich on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2009. (Photo: PHOTOPRESS/Seco/Janosch Abel)



Empa and SECO have been actively engaged in encouraging the environmentally friendly and resource saving disposal of e-waste in developing countries for several years

These images (and others) can be downloaded in print quality resolution from:

<http://www.empa.ch/bilder/2009-08-21-ewaste-vertrag/>