

Free pick-up services could boost e-waste recycling participation

PETALING JAYA: Offering free pick-up services for electronic waste (e-waste) could boost recycling participation rates.

Mohamed Tarek El-Fataty, founder of e-waste recycling company EARTH, said the traditional “drop-off” model – where people bring e-waste to a centre for disposal, either for free or for a fee – has historically resulted in low participation.

“We found that offering free pickup services (similar to e-hailing for e-waste) and free postal delivery options drastically increases participation.

He said financial incentives also help, as e-waste sometimes contains valuable metals such as gold, copper or silver.

“The public should be rewarded for returning these resources,” he told *The Star*.

Tarek suggested the introduction of an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for electronic devices to spur e-waste recycling.

An EPR system for e-waste is a policy approach that makes manufacturers, importers, and brand owners financially and physically responsible for the entire lifecycle of electronic products, particularly for collection, recycling, and final disposal.

Tarek said that with an EPR system, money is collected upfront from manufacturers and retailers and used to reimburse regulated recyclers.

He said the fragmentation of the recycling ecosystem needs to be addressed, with the market split among roughly 400 regulated players.

This has led to issues like inconsistent service quality and makes it difficult for regulators such as the Department of Environment (DOE) to obtain accurate data.

Waste watchdog group Basel Action Network researcher Wong Pui Yi said mandating the separation of e-waste at source for domestic, commercial, industrial and institutional premises could help reduce the problem.

“We need to develop a comprehensive and robust e-waste legal framework and enhance our e-waste management, addressing e-waste collection, treatment, recovery, and final disposal.

“We also must enforce EPR by law for e-waste and oblige producers to either recover their products, or cover the costs of collecting their products to be refurbished, repaired, or recycled,” she said.

Wong said the DOE’s published list of licensed e-waste collectors needs to be publicised more widely and periodically reviewed.

She said pollution from mismanaged e-waste could leach harmful chemicals and heavy metals into soil, water and air.

“These effects are irreversible and will affect our future generations,” she said.