

Talking Trash: All that is left: Metal, glass and medical waste

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In the last few issues, we have been discussing the ways in which one can manage their household waste. Once wet (organic and biodegradable) waste is taken care of, the leftover waste is predominantly plastic and paper. We have looked at ways in which we can manage plastic and paper waste as well. This leaves us to what is left. The remainder of our waste includes electronic waste (E-waste), metal, glass and medical waste. The best part is that electronic, metal and glass waste can all be recycled.

Metal waste: These include tin cans (like milkmaid), containers, old vessels, aluminium foil, etc.

Glass waste: Many food items are packed in glass bottles: Ketchup, alcohol, juices, carbonated drinks, jam, oil, honey, medicines. Sometimes tube lights and bulbs are categorized as glass waste.

The scrap dealer in your area will be more than happy to take (and buy) metal and glass waste from you as they have good resale value. Both metal and glass are recyclable.

Electronic waste (E-Waste): These include more complex gadgets like old computers, laptops, TVs, fridge, mobile phones, washing machines, phones etc. Even wires, remotes, earphones, mouse, keyboards, chargers, batteries come under E-waste.

It is important to dispose e-waste responsibly, because these are often having high content of toxic metals like lead, mercury and cadmium. So just by dumping it in the bin, could mean that they will reach the landfill where they can leach into the soil and nearby water bodies. Thus, they need to be directed to the recycling chain. E-waste are valuable because these can be reused, resold or recycled. One can also salvage valuable metals like gold, silver, copper, aluminum from them which are then reused.

While your local scrap dealer may accept electronic waste, it is best to dispose the e-waste through more formal and organized channels. Many NGOs have e-waste collection centres and many organize e-waste collection drives from time to time. Given that we do not have e-waste to discard on a day to day basis, it is best to accumulate these and dispose them at the right opportunity.



Image 1: Glass waste likely to be generated in the house

Many e-waste recycling centres do not entertain individual household requests to collect e-waste, as it is not economical for them. They prefer liaising with (residential) housing societies or industrial complexes. So, it would be a promising idea to get together to form a group and get your e-waste collected once in six months by an organization.

Medical waste: At a household level, the amount of medical waste that is produced is limited. There can be two types of waste here, one that is considered as bio hazardous like used syringes, blood stained bandages etc. The other kind of waste may include expired medicines/tablets.

Hospitals who mass produce medical waste regularly are supposed to dispose them through a more formal (though not satisfactory) system and these are incinerated. However, currently there is no formal/organized way of disposing household bio hazardous waste. What we can do is - wrap the bio medical waste in paper/plastic and label them with a red cross (X), just like how we would mark for sanitary waste (like soiled pads, diapers). This will atleast caution those sanitation-workers who may handle this at a latter stage.



Image 2: Medical waste (Source: [Wikimedia Commons/Pollo](#))

Many hospitals have drop boxes for collecting expired and non-expired medicines. If you have identified such a hospital or clinic, you can drop your unused/expired medicines there. Some people suggest flushing the tablets down the toilet, but this is not a very good practice.

Research over the years has suggested that flushing drugs like antibiotics, steroids, tranquilizers, painkillers (even though this quantity is less) down the toilets, which will eventually reach our sewer lines and oceans. And this in turn may affect the aquatic environment, for example interfere with life cycles and behaviours of aquatic animals.

Since we do not have better solutions to this problem, tackling medical waste and E-waste could be the (future) points of intervention for citizen initiatives like BYN@88.

With this article, I conclude the “**Talking Trash**” series for *BYN@88 newsletter*. I hope you have found this series useful and interesting. Writing this has been a learning experience for me and I am hoping that with each passing year, citizens help each other to move towards a greener lifestyle.