

# SWaCH to scale up e-waste collection

PUNE: The collection and proper disposal of e-waste in the city is set to get a fillip with waste pickers' collective SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling) having obtained a licence from the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB).

"We have received our licence from the MPCB and we really hope that we can scale up the collection of e-waste," said Pratibha Sharma from SWaCH.

So far, the organization was running a collection unit at Kothrud on the basis of a working certificate issued by the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC). Now that the organization is licensed, the e-waste collection operations can start fully.

"We are proposing to set up three more centres - in Hadapsar, Katraj and Aundh. Each of these centres will be able to cater to the needs of the major IT hubs of the city, such as Hinjewadi and Kharadi," Sharma said.

Last year, SWaCH collected eight tonne e-waste, but with the licence coming through, Sharma expects the collection to increase manifold.

According to an MPCB report prepared in 2007, the city and Pimpri-Chinchwad will produce an estimated 3,500 tonne e-waste by 2015. MPCB records, however, show that only about 429 tonne e-waste is generated by 540 industrial units in the PMC limits in 2012.

There are other e-waste collection firms operating in the city, but SWaCH's model differs from them because it integrates scrap dealers into the process. "At present, scrap dealers collect the bulk of the e-waste in the city. However, instead of recycling the waste through the correct process it gets channeled into the grey market. SWaCH is encouraging them to collect e-waste and deposit it with us," Sharma said.

The biggest challenge to the collection and processing of e-waste through the proper channels is that the rates offered by the grey market are much higher than those offered by licensed recyclers, she said.

This is because there is an environment cost that no one is paying for. At present, we are motivating bhangarwals to sell only to authorized dealers, but the authorities should also start penalizing generators who are selling to unauthorized dealers. The bhangarwala is the most marginalized person in the entire recycling chain for electronics but at present, they are the ones who are being forced to comply with regulations. Consumers who are changing cell phones every year and upgrading computers and laptops annually also need to start bearing these costs, she said.

"Now that we have the licence, we will be able to access the companies that generate a large amount of e-waste. The scrap dealers don't have access to these places. We hope that the lower rates we offer can be offset by the larger volumes that they will be able to collect," she added.