

Environmental Studies Departmental Seminar



Speaker: Yaakov Garb

Title: *The Palestinian-Israeli E-waste commodity chain: Research and advocacy on a hidden crisis*

Date: Jan.10, 2016

Time: 13:15 (refreshments served at 13:00)

Venue: Seminar Room, Bona Terra Dept. MID

Abstract: Over the last several years I have directed a small research team to explore and analyze the informal Palestinian-Israeli commodity chain, through which most Israeli electronic waste has been brought to a cluster of Palestinian villages, where it has been dismantled and processed to extract valuable materials (such as copper and motherboards), as well as reused. As with other e-waste hubs globally, this informal industry has contributed considerable economic opportunity while generating large environmental and health impacts.

In this talk, I will give an overview of the various research efforts conducted by our team since 2012, in close partnership with the local communities, and our increasing role in negotiating broadly consensual ways forward. Drawing on hundreds of interviews with stakeholders in this commodity chain, extensive field observation, surveys, action research, and extensive environmental sampling and remote sensing analysis, my team has constructed a portrait of this value chain (actors, prices, volumes, and dynamics) and shown the nature and extent of its severe environmental and human health impacts. We then worked with the local Palestinian community to develop an integrated proposal that would retain livelihoods while greatly reducing the damage of e-waste recycling. The proposal—now in the final stages of review by Palestinian and Israeli decision-makers—would clean 50-100 highest priority contamination sites, create the economic, organizational, and technical interventions to set the informal Palestinian e-waste sector on a path towards operation as a formal and economically viable industry that maintains livelihoods without posing environmental and health hazards, and establish interacting burn alert and enforcement systems that allow Palestinian communities and institutions to prevent future burns in the region and beyond.

I will mention briefly some socio-analytic reflections on informal commodity chains, their ability to move materials and rework landscapes at large scales, and what we know about them, and some ongoing analysis of burn sites combining multi-temporal and multi-spectral remote sensing, GIS modeling, and field measurements of heavy metal concentrations.