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Pallab Das, Jean-Christophe P Gabriel, Chor Yong Tay, Jong-Min Lee. Value-added products from thermochemical treatments of contaminated e-waste plastics. *Chemosphere*, 2021, 269, pp.129409. 10.1016/j.chemosphere.2020.129409 . cea-03097050

HAL Id: cea-03097050

<https://cea.hal.science/cea-03097050>

Submitted on 5 Jan 2021

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1 **Value-added products from thermochemical treatments of**
2 **contaminated e-waste plastics – A review**

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13 **Abstract**

14 The rise of electronic waste (e-waste) generation around the globe has become a major concern
15 in recent times and their recycling is mostly focussed on the recovery of valuable metals such
16 as gold (Au), silver (Ag) and copper (Cu) etc. However, a significant weight fraction of e-waste
17 consists of plastics (25 – 30%) that are either discarded or incinerated. There is a growing need
18 for recycling of these e-waste plastics majority of them are made from high-quality polymers
19 (composites) such as acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS), high impact polystyrene (HIPS);
20 polycarbonate (PC); polyamide (PA); polypropylene (PP); and epoxies. However, these
21 plastics are contaminated with hazardous materials such as brominated flame retardants (BFRs)
22 and heavy metals (such as lead and mercury). Under any thermal stress, the bromine element
23 (Br) present in the e-waste plastics produces environmentally hazardous pollutants, such as
24 hydrogen bromide or polybrominated diphenyl ethers/furans (PBDE/Fs). The discarded
25 plastics can lead to the leaching of toxins into the environment. Therefore, removal of the toxics
26 chemicals from the e-waste plastics is pre-requisite before considering any thermal process.
27 This review article gives a detailed account of e-waste plastics recycling and recovery using
28 thermochemical processes, such as extraction and pyrolysis. A basic framework of the existing
29 processes has been established by reviewing the most interesting findings in recent times and
30 the prospects that they open in the field recycling of e-waste plastics.

31 **Key words:** e-waste plastic, brominated flame retardants, pyrolysis, extraction and
32 solvothermal treatment

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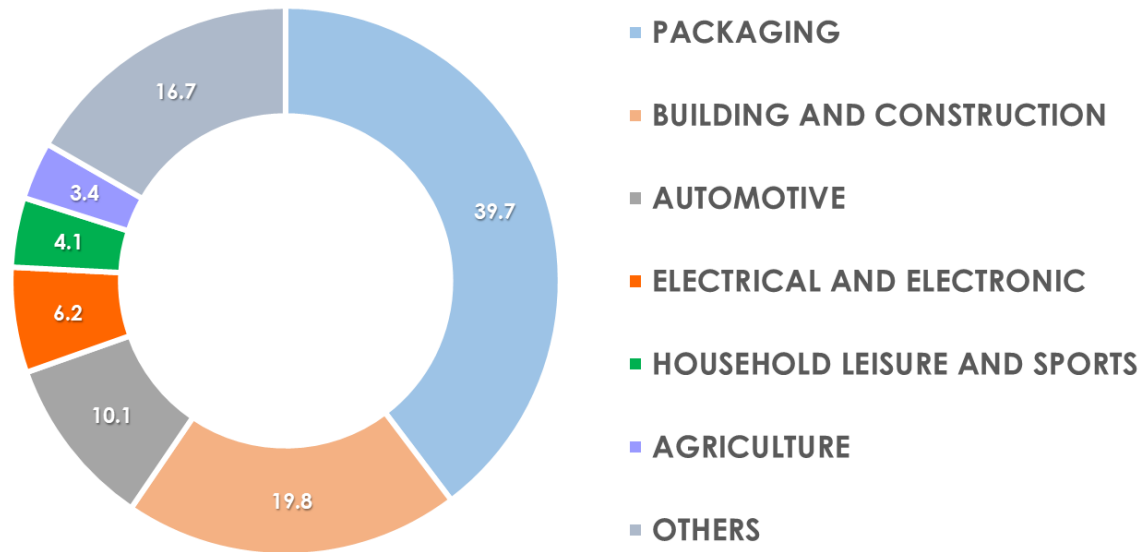
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57		

58 **1 Introduction**

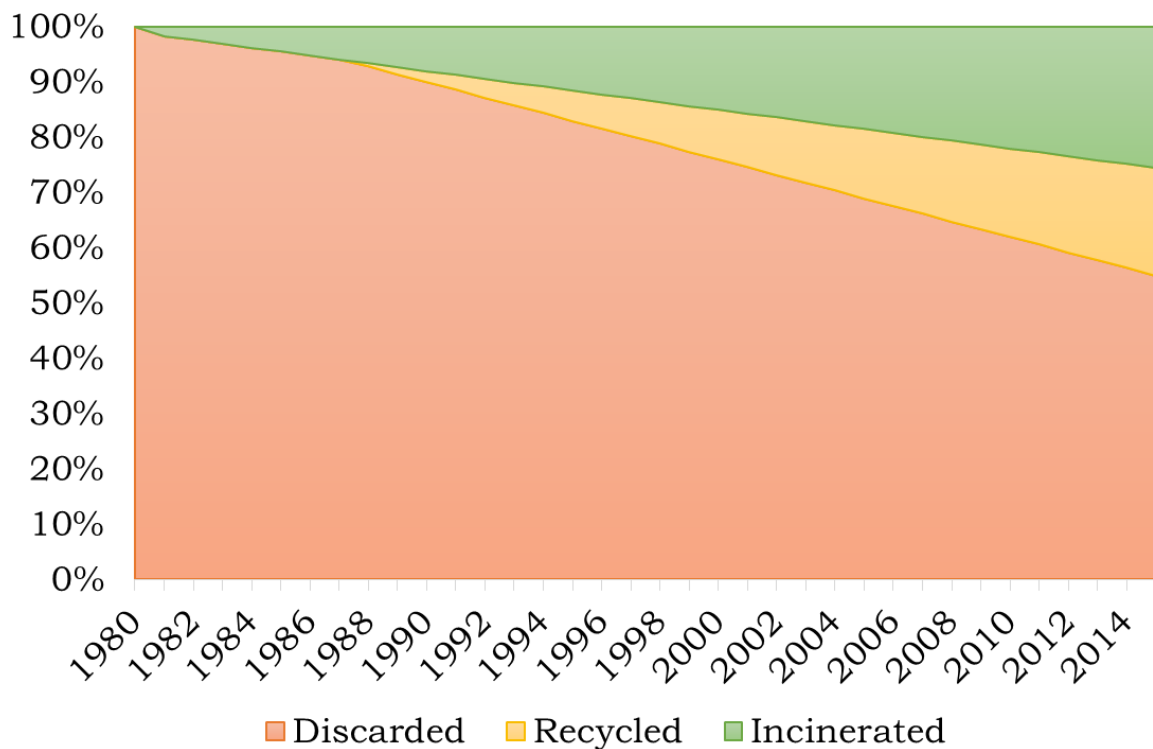
59 Plastics are considered as synthetic and semisynthetic materials that are produced from large
60 organic molecules, mixed with different additives, like flame retardants, stabilizers,
61 plasticizers, colours and pigments. Additives improve the physical and chemical properties of
62 the plastic end products. Extensive use of plastics in the manufacturing industry could be
63 attributed to their superior physical and chemical properties, such as high tensile strength,
64 durability, lightweight, flexibility, heat and chemical resistance etc. A recent report estimated
65 that till date the production of virgin plastics amounted to 8300 million metric tons (MMT) and
66 out of which 6300 MMT becomes waste (Geyer et al., 2017).

67 Both plastic production and plastic generation have been increasing due to wide spread
68 application of plastics and its low life span such packaging plastics. Sector wise demand of
69 plastics in Europe is shown in Fig. 1. It was estimated in 2015, that around 55 percent of global
70 plastic waste was discarded, 25 percent was incinerated and only 20 percent was recycled (Fig.
71 2). Out of the total plastic waste produced between 1950 and 2015, only 9 percent was recycled
72 (Geyer et al., 2017). Most of the discarded plastics are non-biodegradable and take hundreds
73 of years to degrade naturally. The majority of plastics waste can be traced back to its original
74 source such as packaging, building material and automobile waste. However, only 6-7% of
75 plastic waste comes from the e-wastes. The presence of e-waste plastics in the waste stream
76 makes it problematic since they may contain contaminated toxins, such as brominated flame
77 retardants (BFRs) and heavy metals (Wang, 2018; Forum, 2019).



78

79 **Fig. 1: Distribution of plastics demand by segments in Europe 2017 (Europe, 2018;**
 80 **Forum, 2019)**



81

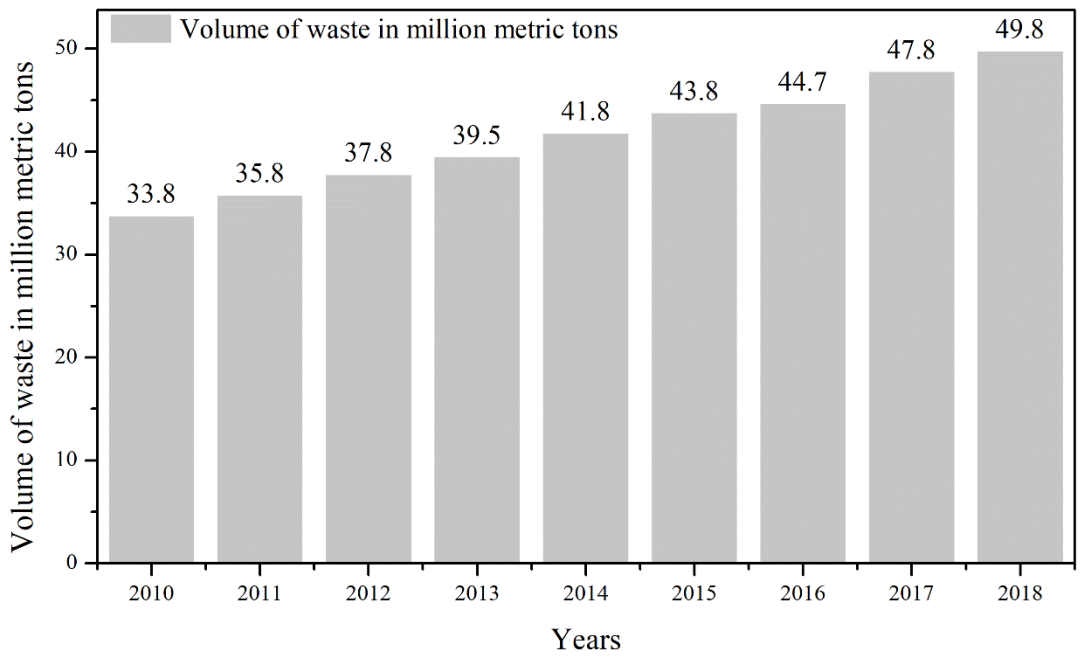
82 **Fig. 2: Global disposal of plastic waste from 1980 to 2015 (Geyer et al., 2017)**

83

84 Due to the rapid technological advancement in the field of household appliance, mobile
85 communication and computers, the global generation of e-waste keeps on increasing and
86 becomes a burden to the waste management systems. The quantity of e-waste generation varies
87 with countries based on the economy and lifestyle of the country (Wang et al., 2016). The per
88 capita generation of e-waste is highest in Norway which was estimated to be 28.5 kg/person
89 (2016). The countries, like China, India, Philippines and African nations, hugely processed the
90 electronic wastes generated in developed countries. Electronic waste contains a variety of
91 substances including precious gold, silver, copper along with toxic substances, such as lead
92 (Pb), polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), polychlorinated and polybrominated dioxins
93 and furans (Tsydenova and Bengtsson, 2011). The emission of these toxic substances during
94 recycling may cause serious health hazards to the lives of workers and other livelihoods present
95 in the surrounding (Grant et al., 2013).

96 The generation of electronic and electrical waste increases continuously in recent years due to
97 the fast growth of the use of home appliances, consumer electronics gadgets, like cell phones,
98 tablets, video game consoles, music player, digital camera, laptops, set-top boxes, etc. E-wastes
99 definition usually comprises of discarded electronic, electrical pieces of equipment, light bulbs,
100 and batteries. The waste generator can be the manufacturer (due to defect or obsolescence) or
101 the consumer when the equipment reached its end of their service life (Robinson, 2009). Fig.
102 3 shows the trends of generation of electronic and electrical waste in recent years. An increase
103 of 47% of e-waste generation has been observed from the year 2010 to 2018 (Baldé et al.,
104 2017). The United Nation's recent assessment reported that about 44.7 MMT of e-waste was
105 generated globally in the year 2016 and only 20% (8.9 million metric tonnes) was recycled. The
106 amount of e-waste generation was projected to reach 52.2 MMT by 2021 (Forum, 2019). Of these
107 discarded e-waste, 80% go either in landfills or incineration. An extra amount of complexity in
108 the treatment of these e-wastes arises from their toxic content and potential hazardous

109 emissions which makes it paramount to search for sustainable solutions for their recycling.
110 Most of modern electrical and electronic pieces of equipment use engineering plastics in the
111 manufacturing of their outer body. Inner components also use plastics/epoxy, such as insulating
112 foams, printed circuit boards (PCBs), component's packaging, cables insulators, wirings,
113 connector, switches etc. To ensure both safety and longevity of electronic devices, additives
114 like BFRs, bromine bearing hydrocarbons, are added to the plastics to improve their fire
115 resistance (Altarawneh et al., 2019). But if BFRs are efficient flame retardant they may also
116 produce toxins during waste treatment. Apart from BFRs, e-waste plastics may contain trace
117 amounts of metals and heavy metals, such as Pb, Cu, Ni, Al, Zn, Ba, Ag, Au, Sn, etc. These
118 are very profusely present within plastics from PCBs, their soldered components or in plastics
119 in their near vicinity (Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2009). Heavy metals are also sometime added as
120 additive (for example as pigment) to the plastics (Cherif Lahimer et al., 2017). Heavy metals
121 contamination also limits the recovery of the e-waste plastics for the recycle and reuse.



122

123 **Fig. 3: Trend of worldwide e-waste generation in recent years (Wang, 2018)**

124 The plastic used in Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment (WEEE) are fabricated from
 125 polymers that are produced from fossil fuels (petroleum/coke) and are rich in carbon and
 126 hydrogen. Depolymerisation or control degradation can revert back plastics into useful feed
 127 stock or in last resort into fuel for transport industry. The latter being the least favourable from
 128 an entropy point of view, it allows to recover the contained energy but waste all the chemical
 129 treatment that has been put into its manufacturing process. Common plastics used in WEEEs
 130 with respective calorific values are listed in Table 1. The utilization of plastics as energy source
 131 is significant as a vast quantity of plastics goes into the waste stream every day.

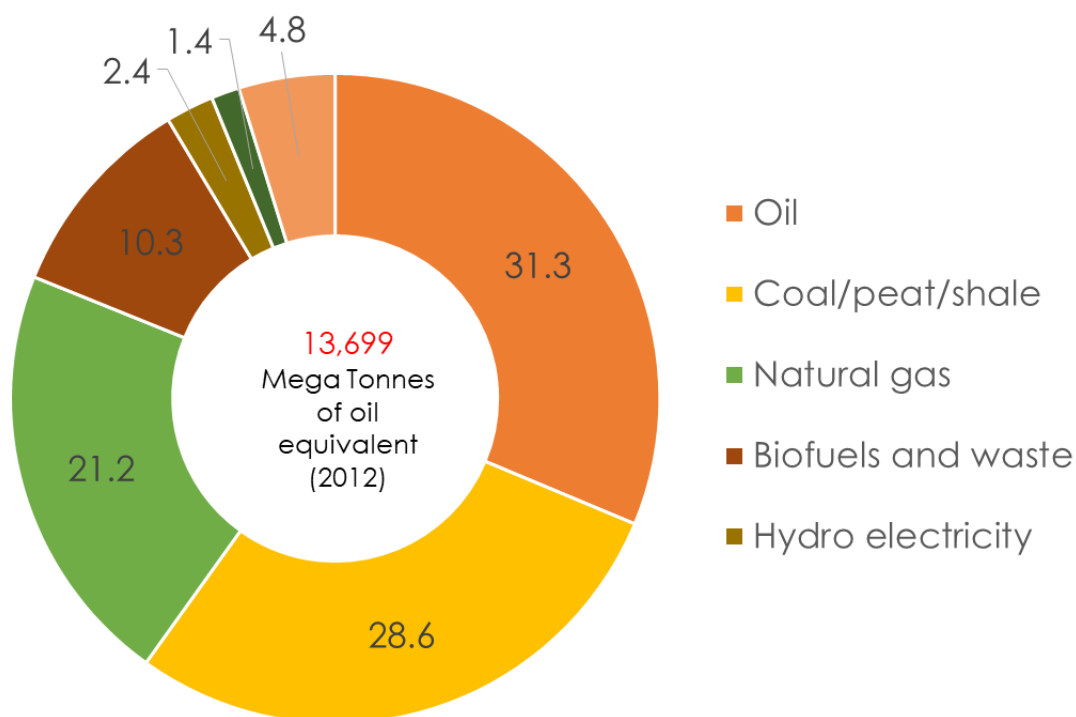
132 **Table 1: Heating values of plastics found in solid waste stream (Walters et al.; Othman et**
 133 **al., 2009)**

Plastics	Calorific value (MJ/kg)
PE (LD/HD)	47.7
PP	45.3
PET	24.1
PS	41.4
PVC	14.1
PC	26.7
PMMA	24.1
PA	26.5
ABS	35.2
HIPS	37.8

134

135 Indeed, the global energy consumption increases constantly and it was estimated to be around
 136 20,000 million tons of oil equivalent by the year 2050 (Coyne, 2018). In the year 2018, the rate
 137 of growth of energy consumption to the previous year was 2.9% which was the highest rate of
 138 growth compared to the previous seven years and double the average of last 10 years along
 139 with 2% growth of carbon emission due to energy production (Global, 2019). Due to carbon
 140 emission and the shortage of fossil fuel resources, the world is moving towards renewable and
 141 sustainable energy sources, such as solar, wind, tidal, hydropower, geothermal, bio-energy, etc.

142 About 80% of the current global energy demand is currently provided by fossil fuel and 90%
143 of world transportation runs on petroleum oil (Jefferson, 2016). Around 14% (total) of global
144 energy demand is supplied by renewal sources (Fig. 4). The fraction of energy supplied by
145 renewal energy sources increases continuously over the years to minimize the energy
146 dependency on fossil fuel.



147

148 **Fig. 4: Primary global energy consumption by sources (Agency, 2014)**

149 In this critical review of thermochemical conversion of WEEE plastic wastes, their use as an
150 alternative source for useful mono- or oligomers or for fuel, such as gasoline and diesel, is
151 discussed in details. The effect of WEEE plastics' contamination in their production is
152 investigated on the basis of the most relevant previous studies. It should be noted that plastics
153 used in electric and electronics devices are not similar to those of commodity plastics or single-
154 use plastics present in the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW). The presence of toxins and

155 contaminants like BFRs and heavy metals in e-waste plastics makes their thermochemical
156 conversion process more complex and challenging.

157 Previous review articles mostly focused on the impact of toxins present in e-wastes on the
158 environment as well as on the recovery of metals from e-waste. Therefore, in addition to the
159 impact of e-waste plastics on the environment, we will compare here the different recycling
160 processes enabling their transformation into valuable products, discuss the significance of
161 recycling e-waste plastics, the effect of the toxins present in the plastics and the complexity
162 involved in the removal of toxins to recover original polymers. Hence, this review article
163 addresses the gaps in the current status quo of the industrial recycling of e-waste plastics and
164 the latest developments in this field. This critical study will furthermore help future researchers
165 and engineers to choose how to process and recycle their mixed stream of plastic wastes
166 containing e-waste plastics including their possible conversion into energy.

167 **2 Plastic waste and its environmental impact**

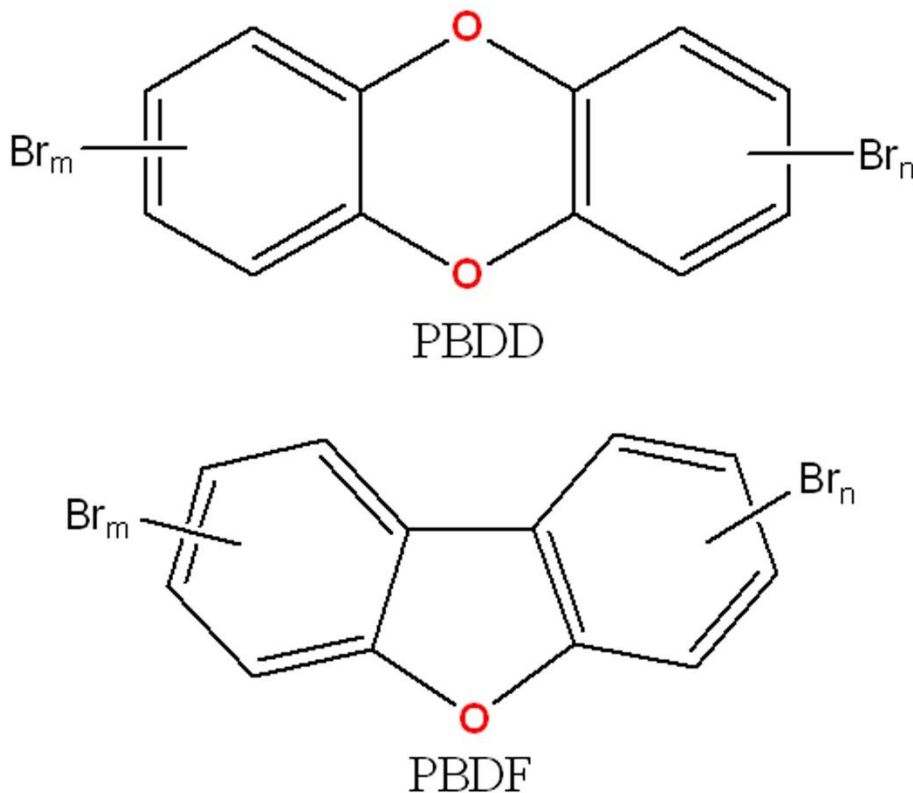
168 The global generation of plastic waste keeps on increasing as the production of new plastics
169 keeps on increasing. In the year 2015, an estimated amount of 381 MMT of plastics (polymer
170 resin and fibre) was produced globally (Geyer et al., 2017). Around 44% of global plastic
171 production consumed in packaging application such as single-use containers, bottles, bags etc.
172 (Geyer et al., 2017). The life span of plastics products varies, from weeks for packaging plastics
173 to several years for electronics, electrical equipments and building appliances (Buekens, 2006;
174 Lazarevic et al., 2010).

175 Most plastics are non-biodegradable and the growing plastic waste generation leads to huge
176 garbage accumulation in landfills as well as various natural surroundings like rivers and oceans.
177 In 2010 an estimated amount of 4.8 to 12.7 MMT of plastic waste debris entered in to the
178 oceans from 192 coastal countries(Jambeck et al., 2015). This situation is worsening due to the

179 global increase of plastic waste generation, which raise the concern regarding the adverse
180 consequences to marine life, ecosystem sustainability and potentially to human health
181 (Lebreton et al., 2017). This threat is even more significant than initially estimated due to the
182 mechanical degradation of plastics into microparticles (Hurley et al., 2018). Solid waste
183 plastics are also responsible for many socio-environmental complications in many developed
184 as well as developing countries, such as soil contamination, ground water pollution, floods,
185 deadly diseases, animal death due to direct consumption or strangling and surface water
186 pollution (Rigamonti et al., 2014).

187 WEEEs are generally treated separately from MSW as they contain many toxic substances,
188 such as mercury (Hg), lead (Pb), selenium (Se), cadmium (Cd), hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)),
189 polybrominated diphenyl (PBD) and BFR. Sorted out e-wastes undergo separate treatments for
190 dismantling, separation of metallic and non-metallic fractions. Non-metallic fractions, mainly
191 containing plastics, undergo recovery and recycling processes. E-waste plastics have diverse
192 composition but are mostly made up of ABS, HIPS, HDPE, PA, PP, PC, etc. Flame retardants
193 are essential to electronic and electrical pieces of equipment due to meet requirements from
194 fire safety codes. Most common form of flame retardants used in the plastics of electronic
195 products are BFRs. Most abundantly used commercial flame retardants were polybrominated
196 diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), tetrabromobisphenol A (TBBPA), hexabromocyclodecane (HBCD),
197 Decabromodiphenyl ether (deca-BDE) etc., however, due to environmental safety, use of these
198 BFRs was restricted and they have been replaced by less harmful ones based on nitrogen,
199 phosphorous and other inorganics (Singh and Jain, 2009). Polybrominated diphenyl ethers
200 (PBDEs) were some of the most commonly used BFRs over the last few decades. More
201 specifically, BFRs such as HBCDs and TBBPA are still extensively used despite being
202 considered as persistent organic pollutants (POP) and referred as novel BFRs (Covaci et al.,
203 2011). During any thermal stress, the BFRs in the e-waste plastics can produce brominated

204 aromatic compounds which are precursors to the polybrominated dibenzo-p-dioxins (PBDD)
205 and polybrominated dibenzo furans (PBDF) (Weber and Kuch, 2003; Zhang et al., 2016). Trace
206 amount of PBDD and PBDF can cause severe health hazards. Toxicity profiles of different
207 isomers of PBDD/Fs depend on the number of Bromine atoms and what positions they attached
208 to. Basic PBDE and PBDF structures are given in Fig. 5.



209

210 **Fig. 5 : Molecular structure of PBDD and PBDF**

211 Metal hydroxides, such as Gibbsite (aluminium trihydroxide, ATH), magnesium di-hydroxide
212 (MDH), and Boehmite (Aluminium-oxide-hydroxide, AOH), are among the most common
213 inorganic ones (Qian et al., 2014). Flame retardants are also used based on their compatibility
214 with polymer resins such as melamine cyanurate and melamine phosphate which are
215 compatible with polyamides and polypropylene, respectively (Liu et al., 2006). Although most
216 European countries restricted the use of halogenated flame retardants, a worldwide replacement

217 with non-halogenated FR is not yet achieved and BFRs are still the primary source of flame
218 retardants in various regions of the world. Due to the huge volume accumulation of e-waste
219 most European countries and USA export the e-waste to Asia or Africa for recycling, where e-
220 waste recycling workers often put themselves into high health risk due to the lack of sustainable
221 technology and safe practice know-how (Zhu et al., 2008; Muenhor et al., 2010; He et al., 2012;
222 Malliari and Kalantzi, 2017; Li et al., 2018). Open burning of e-waste to recover metals is a
223 common practice in African countries (Cao et al., 2020) resulted the emission of harmful
224 dioxins, furans, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAHs), polyhalogenated aromatic
225 hydrocarbon (PHAHs) and hydrogen halides. E-waste can further be a source of soil and
226 ground water contamination due to lixiviation and leaching as well as air pollution due to
227 burning. Tang *et al.* (Tang et al., 2010) investigated the soil sample near Wenling, an e-waste
228 recycling city of Taizhou province in China and reported concentrations ranging from 371.8 to
229 1231.2 µg/kg of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and 52 – 5789.5 µg/kg of
230 polychlorinated biphenyls, which are significantly higher than the permissible limit set by the
231 governmental bodies and legislatures. Tue et al. (Tue et al., 2017) reported high concentration
232 of Cl-PAH and Br-PAH in the range 160 – 220 ng/g and 19 – 40 ng/g respectively in the soil
233 samples from the soil samples collected from the open e-waste burning area of Agbogbloshie's
234 e-waste recycling site in Ghana.. Reports of soil contamination with heavy metals at the e-
235 waste recycling sites have been reported (Luo et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Damrongsiri et
236 al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2019).

237 Surface water contamination due to non-regularised and un-licensed e-waste recycling
238 facilities is also a major concern. Leaching and lixiviation of toxic chemicals (PAHs, heavy
239 metals) from e-waste landfilling and waste acidic waters from recycling sites led to significant
240 surface and ground water contamination (Wu et al., 2015). Air borne pollutants are also
241 generated by open burnings, incinerations and combustions. Heating or burning of e-waste that

242 contain halogenated compounds, such as BFRs, may lead to the emission of environmentally
243 hazardous substances, like polybrominated, diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), polychlorinated dibenzo
244 dioxins (PCDDs), polybrochlorobenzo dioxins and polychlorobenzofurans (PBCDD/Fs)
245 (Vehlow et al., 2000; Vehlow et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2010). Such toxins from e-wastes can
246 cause chronic and acute health conditions to human (Kiddee et al., 2013). Traces of toxic
247 substances like brominated or chlorinated fire retardants and heavy metals were found in the
248 human (recycle workers) blood, urine, and milk and hair samples (Grant et al., 2013). These
249 pollutants and toxic chemicals can cause serious health risk to human as well as animals. The
250 recycling processes of plastic wastes from different sources require sincere attention in removal
251 of toxics and contaminants before converting the waste into useful resources.

252 **3 Plastic waste management and disposal techniques**

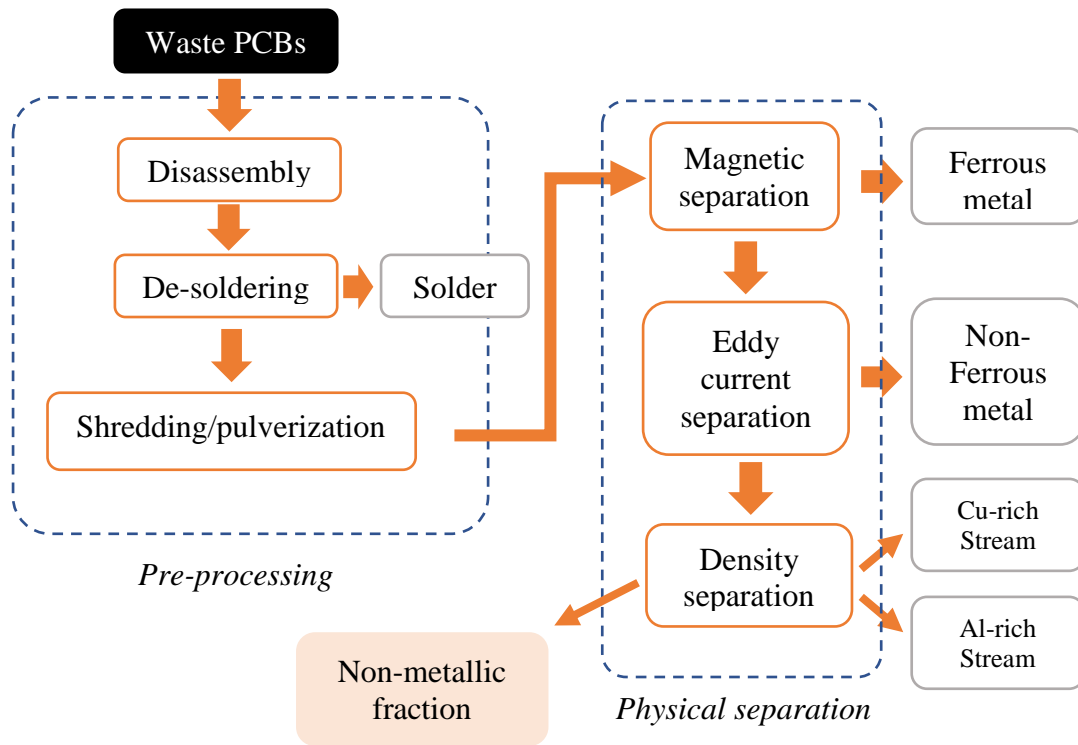
253 Physical properties of plastics vary with polymer types, class of additives and manufacturing
254 techniques employed. Polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate
255 (PET) and polystyrene (PS) etc. are widely used for packaging and single use plastic products.
256 On the other hand, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS), Nylon 6,
257 Nylon 6,6, polyamide (PA), polybutylene terephthalate (PBT), polycarbonate (PC),
258 polyetheretherketone (PEEK), polyetherketone (PEK), polysulphone (PSU),
259 polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE/Teflon), etc, are known as engineering plastics used as building
260 materials and in automobile parts. The service life of most engineering plastics are higher than
261 that of single use or packaging ones. ABS, HIPS, PC, PP, PA, etc., are also found in electronic
262 or electrical plastic wastes. Due to the turnover rate of lifestyle electronic goods like mobile
263 phones, computers, tablets, etc., there is a significant increase in e-waste plastic generation in
264 recent years.

265 Around 10 – 12 % of MSW of the world consists of plastic waste (Diaz et al., 2020). The
266 recycling of solid waste like plastics depends of efficient collection and segregation which is
267 influenced by the economic status of the country(Joshi and Ahmed, 2016). The techniques of
268 plastics recycling can be classified into primary secondary and tertiary recycling, which we
269 will review in subsequent sections.

270 **3.1 Primary and secondary (mechanical) recycling**

271 Primary and secondary recycling deal with the mechanical means of recycling of plastic wastes,
272 such as grinding, washing, separating, drying, re-granulating, extrusion and compounding (Al-
273 Salem et al., 2009). Mechanical processes are utilized to produce recyclates from plastic waste.
274 Primary recycling is the process of producing the same or similar products, whereas secondary
275 recycling produces products with substandard quality, such as dustbins, furniture, plastic vases,
276 etc. Primary recycling needs pure and homogenous plastic wastes (in-plant scrap), while
277 secondary recycling uses post-consumer plastic. High production costs are the concern in the
278 implementation of primary and secondary recycling. Mechanical processing is at the basis of
279 any recycling process, especially for electronic wastes that comprise of a complex mixture of
280 many materials (valuable and hazardous, or not) including metals (ferrous or non-ferrous) and
281 non-metals like plastics, glass, ceramics with various sizes and shapes. Hence, it is important
282 to utilize cost effective sustainable mechanical processes to separate the different components
283 of e-wastes as best as possible. WEEEs undergo dismantling and sorting steps at the beginning
284 of the recycling process. Complex components, such as PCBs, after being extracted from their
285 original equipment usually undergo grinding and the separation of metallic (ferrous and non-
286 ferrous) and non-metallic fractions. In Fig. 6, a process flowchart is shown that is rigorously
287 followed in many waste PCB recycling industries. Separation processes include screening
288 (Wilson et al., 1994), shape separation (Furuuchi and Gotoh, 1992; Furuuchi et al., 1993),
289 magnetic separation (Veit et al., 2005), electric conductive base separation (Meier-Staude and

290 Koehnlechner, 2000), density base separation (Schubert, 1991), etc. Wäger *et al.* (Wäger et al.,
291 2011) confirmed that mechanically recycled electronic and electrical waste plastics have five
292 times lower environment impact than virgin plastics in the manufacturing of plastic products.
293 However, past studies suggested that 25 – 30 wt% of the collected e-waste plastics have BFR
294 as additive and it is difficult to recycle them mechanically (Brennan et al., 2002; Stenvall et al.,
295 2013; Baldé et al., 2017). The e-waste plastics with BFR are not suitable for primary and
296 secondary recycling. Pre-treatment processes like solvent extraction, chemical leaching and
297 other chemical treatment (with acid/alkalis) can remove the toxic chemicals from e-waste
298 plastics and convert them into mechanically reusable plastics. BFRs that are not chemically
299 bound to the polymer chain can be removed from the plastic matrix by the solvent extraction
300 processes. Efficient and sustainable solvent extraction process assisted by microwave, ultra-
301 sonication or supercritical CO₂ extraction processes can be developed for BFR extraction from
302 e-waste plastics. On the other hand, thermal degradation can remove chemically bonded Br in
303 the plastics.



304

305 **Fig. 6: schematic representation of the physical separation process of MF and NMF of**
 306 **PCB**

307 3.2 Tertiary (chemical and thermal) recycling

308 Tertiary or chemical recovery of plastic waste is a promising aspect in the recovery of valuable
 309 chemicals and fuels (Achilias et al., 2007; Yildirim et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2014). Its principle
 310 lies behind the alteration of the polymer's chemical structure by depolymerisation. Major
 311 advantages of chemical recycling over mechanical recycling is that it allows processing of
 312 heterogeneous and contaminated plastics with limited pre-treatment opportunities. Chemical
 313 recycling can convert plastics like polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and nylon into their
 314 monomer units (feedstock recycling) (Veregue et al., 2018; Choi and Choi, 2019; Jehanno et
 315 al., 2019; Vesnin et al., 2020), while the polyolefin type of plastics produce a mixture that can
 316 be precursor to liquid fuel (Coates and Getzler). Processes, such as dissolution, hydrogenation,
 317 gasification, pyrolysis, and catalytic cracking, come under chemical recycling of plastics.

318 Achilias et al. (Achilias et al., 2009) carried out chemical recycling of PC, PABS, and PS from
319 WEEE by means of dissolution/re-precipitation and pyrolysis. More than 90% recovery of
320 polymers was reported by the dissolution process where pyrolysis converted the model PC
321 sample into 63% liquid product. Pyrolysis or thermolysis of plastics is a process of thermal
322 decomposition of plastics under inert or oxygen-starved conditions. These processes are able
323 to convert high molecular weight plastics into low molecular weight hydrocarbons and
324 chemicals (Kaminsky et al., 1995; Adrados et al., 2012). The process of plastic waste into oil
325 (fuel) through pyrolysis has been developed and practiced. Processes like Thermofuel™
326 (Ozmotech Pty Ltd), Smuda process, Royco process (EZ-oil generator), Reentech process,
327 Hitachi process, Chiyoda process (Chiyoda corp. Japan), Blowdec process, Conrad processes
328 are some of the processes available for the commercial utilization (Scheirs and Kaminsky,
329 2006). These processes are mostly handled polyolefin types of plastics available in MSW. By
330 reducing the process cost and up-scaling the present capacity of the technologies may lead to a
331 wide-scale industrial application of plastic pyrolysis. The heat recovery processes like
332 combustion, incineration and gasification are also considered as tertiary recycling processes,
333 however, these techniques are sometimes separately identified as quaternary recycling
334 processes (Al-Salem et al., 2009).

335 Regarding PCBs' epoxy resin, they are usually used as fuel in pyrometallurgy plants that recover
336 precious metals. Since they are made of cross-linked polymers with the aim of high chemical,
337 time and temperature stabilities their up-cycling is a difficult problem. In the field of
338 depolymerisation, it is worth noting that in 2019, Chen et al. (2019) reported an original process
339 enabling the dissolution of anhydride epoxy thanks to a transesterification reaction occurring
340 between the -OH group in ethylene glycol, used as solvent, and the ester bond within the epoxy
341 network. To be efficient, the reaction uses the transesterification catalyst (1,5,7-
342 Triazabicyclo[4.4.0]dec-5-ene). Also, a diffusion solvent (N-Methyl-2-Pyrrolidinone) allows

343 for the swelling of the resin, allowing for both the ethylene glycol and catalyst to penetrate
344 within the cross-linked epoxy network. Reaction time varied from 6h to 40 min when using
345 reaction temperatures of 100 °C and 180 °C, respectively.

346 **4 Removal of toxic molecules from e-waste plastics**

347 E-waste plastics a notoriously known to be tainted with toxic compounds such as BFRs and
348 heavy metals (Tange and Drohmann, 2005; Das et al., 2009; Li et al., 2009; Peng et al., 2010;
349 Damrongsiri et al., 2016; Debnath et al., 2018). Over the years, the European Union regulated
350 and restricted various substances in plastics particularly in the case of electronics and electrical
351 goods (E.U., 2015). Table 2 lists restricted substances and their permissible limits in such
352 goods. The science of removal of the toxic chemicals from e-wastes has been explored and a
353 number of technologies were investigated that optimize energy and material consumptions.
354 The removal of metal contamination at the molecular level is difficult by mechanical and
355 physical means described in section 3.1 (Kurose et al., 2006; Li et al., 2007). Although
356 hydrometallurgical processes like leaching assisted with cyanide, thiourea, thiosulfate or halide
357 have been developed mainly for to recover precious metals from waste PCBs (Cui and Zhang,
358 2008; Zhang et al., 2012), they can also be used for the removal of contaminated metal from
359 e-waste plastics. Regarding PCBs, they are an essential part of any electronic equipment and
360 represent between approximately 2-3% of total e-waste generated worldwide (Vats and Singh,
361 2014). PCBs are also abundant in small electronic devices, such as mobile, tablets and other
362 smart devices. A typical PCB is constructed with a Cu-clad laminate which consists of glass
363 fibre reinforced with epoxy resin, plastics and metals (Hsu et al., 2019). It was approximated
364 that a PCB contains roughly 40% metals, 30% organics and 30% refractory (ca. fibre glass)
365 (Shuey and Taylor, 2005). PCBs are generally treated for the extraction of some of the valuable
366 metals they contain, such as Cu, Al, Ag and Au (Oh et al., 2003). The pre-treatment process
367 follows the common processes stated in section 3.1 (Fig. 6) to separate the metallic fraction

368 (MF) and the non-metallic fraction (NMF). The MF then undergoes intense chemical treatment
 369 to recover valuable chemical components. The non-metallic part of the PCBs is most toxic as
 370 it contains traces of solders made from Pb/Sn and BFRs. Although, recent PCBs are lead free
 371 solder most old PCBs have 2-5% of Pb in their solder (Ghosh et al., 2015).

372 **Table 2: Restricted substances used in the electronic and electrical goods by EU (E.U.,**
 373 **2015)**

Toxic substance	Permissible limit (wt%) [†]
Lead (Pb)	0.1
Mercury (Hg)	0.1
Cadmium (Cd)	0.01
Hexavalent Chromium (Cr ⁶)	0.1
Polybrominated biphenyls (PBB)	0.1
Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE)	0.1
Bis(2-ethylexyl)phthalate (DEHP)	0.1
Butyl benzyl phthalate (BBP)	0.1
Dibutyl phthalate	0.1
Diisobutyl phthalate (DIBP)	0.1

374 [†]0.1 wt% = 1000 ppm and 0.01 wt% = 100 ppm

375 **4.1 Removal of BFR from e-waste plastics**

376 The BFRs are relentless and bioaccumulative toxins in nature, and their decomposition
 377 pathways during thermal treatment have been previously reported (Ma et al., 2016a). The
 378 treatments to recover BFR free plastics or products are discussed in the subsequent sections.

379 **4.2 Solvothermal processes to remove BFRs from e-waste plastic**

380 High extraction efficiencies can be achieved with conventional solvent extraction with organic
 381 solvents (Suzuki et al., 2002; Zhang and Zhang, 2012b). Toluene, methanol, 1-propanol,
 382 isopropanol, acetonitrile, and ethanol are some of the common organic solvents used (Altwaiq
 383 et al., 2003; Evangelopoulos et al., 2019). Different extraction processes, such as pressurised

384 liquid extraction (PLE), ultrasonic assisted extraction (UAE), microwave assisted extraction
385 (MAE) and simple Soxhlet extraction have been proposed and investigated for BFRs extraction
386 (Vilaplana et al., 2008).

387 Chandrasekaran *et al.* (Chandrasekaran et al., 2018) recovered 89% of pure PC from the
388 mixture of PC/PA (from waste cell phones) by solvent extraction using N-methyl-2-
389 pyrrolidone (NMP). NMP was preferred to dichloromethane (DCM) for selective dissolution
390 of PC and to avoid the use of the chlorinated solvents. The study also emphasize the important
391 of the factors such as solid matrix, initial BFR content, solvent polarity, solid liquid ratio,
392 temperature and pressure affecting the BFR removal efficiency and temperature being the most
393 dominant factor in the extraction process. Vilaplana et al. (Vilaplana et al., 2008) reported the
394 use of mixed solvent systems (isopropanol/hexane and isopropanol/methanol) and achieved a
395 high recovery of BFRs. Complete recovery of TBBPA and HBCD was reported by the process
396 of MEA, using isopropanol/n-hexane as solvents at 130°C for 60 min, however UAE gives
397 recovery rates that are strongly temperature dependant and that increase with temperature
398 (Vilaplana et al., 2008; Romarís-Hortas et al., 2009). Hence, optimal conditions for extraction
399 processes vary for different types of feedstock. carried out extraction of deca-BDE from HIPS
400 matrix using an ionic liquid (IL) prepared with by the mixture of 1-bromobutane, 2-(2-
401 chloroethoxy) ethanol and 3-bromopropionitrile. The IL was able to achieve 92.7% of BDE
402 recovery from the HIPS. ILs can be designed based on the material property and improve the
403 extraction efficiency, however in plastic waste recycling processes, operational costs play a
404 vital role which as yet precluded the industrial use of ILs so far. Zhang and Zhang (2012a)
405 studied three alcohols (methanol, ethanol and isopropanol) as solvent for the extraction of
406 TBBPA from e-waste plastics inside a pressurised vessel reactor, and reported that methanol
407 was the most suitable one under optimum conditions of 90°C, 2h of extraction time and liquid
408 to solid ration of 15:1, respectively. It should be noted that at high extraction temperature it

409 was observed that plastics underwent marginal swelling, but this did not seem to affect it
410 properties.

411 Properties of the solvent plays a critical role in the solvothermal treatment in removal of BFRs
412 from plastic. The solvents must have swelling capacity without dissolving the plastic and at the
413 same time must have the affinity to dissolve the BFRs. Mixed solvents with polar and non-
414 polar solvents tends to increase the efficiency of the extraction if we are dealing with different
415 types of analytes having contrasting polarity and molecular weight (Vandenburg et al., 1998).
416 Temperature play a crucial role in the extraction process. The optimum temperature for the
417 extraction of additives from the plastics should not exceed the glass transition temperature
418 (Lateef et al., 2008). High temperature may result excessive swelling and collapse of the
419 polymer structure.

420 Supercritical carbon dioxide (Sc-CO₂) extraction processes have also been proposed, as early
421 as 2000 (Gamse et al., 2000), as possible advanced sustainable processes for BFR removal
422 (Altwaiq et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2004) and the decontamination and recovery of pure plastics
423 from the contaminated e-waste plastics (Gamse et al., 2000; Nakajima et al., 2002; Ma et al.,
424 2016a; Ben Said et al., 2017; Egerer et al., 2019). The interest in using Sc-CO₂ reside in its
425 intermediate properties between liquid and gas which enable for fast diffusion within polymer
426 and reasonable solubilizing capacity. High extraction efficiency has however only be reported
427 when using organic co-solvents which significantly reduce the environmental advantage as
428 well as increase running costs. More research is therefore needed to enable a pure ScCO₂ based
429 extraction process allowing for plastics decontamination and reuse.

430 In 2020, Zhang and Zhang (2020) reported a high efficiency Sc-CO₂ based process for
431 dehalogenation of e-waste plastics into halogen-free products without the need of any catalysts
432 or additives. When temperature in the range of 375-550°C dehalogenation of up to 99.51%

433 could be achieved producing halogen-free products (solid carbon materials as well as organic
434 chemicals). This study performed at the laboratory scale will still need further investigations
435 to prove its industrial potential and economic viability.

436 These results indicate that significant amount of work is required for the development and
437 optimization of large scale extraction processes adapted to additive BFRs. In cases of reactive
438 BFRs, which cannot be lixiviated out, a thermochemical treatment is usually required. Bromine
439 or its derivatives must be separated during the pyrolysis process from the oil/gas products,
440 ideally into solid residues, by using suitable catalysts. The following sections will discuss the
441 thermochemical treatment of plastic waste and role of high temperature processes, such as
442 incineration, combustion and pyrolysis in the recycling of e-waste plastics.

443 **5 Thermochemical treatment of plastic waste**

444 Thermochemical approaches of recycling e-waste plastics entail processes, such as
445 incineration, combustion or pyrolysis. Incineration and combustion involve burning the waste
446 (oxidation) and pyrolysis is here referred as a process of degradation by heating the material
447 under an oxygen-starved environment (Das and Tiwari, 2018b).

448 **5.1 Incineration/combustion process for plastic disposal:**

449 Incineration and combustion of MSW are usually carried out to reduce the amount of waste to
450 landfill as well as whenever possible to recover some of its chemical energy, to convert it into
451 electricity (Liu and Liu, 2005). As most plastics are produced from petroleum resources, they
452 intrinsically have high calorific value. Up to now, incineration/burning of post-consumer
453 plastic waste is one of the traditional ways of retrieving energy from waste, and incineration
454 plants are successfully operated in many developed countries. A major advantage of
455 incineration of plastics is the solid volume reduction by 90 – 99% (Arvanitoyannis, 2013). With
456 reduced volume, it is easy to dispose of the solid residue. The major plastic types found in the

457 waste stream are highly carbonaceous and have a very high heat of combustion (Table 3).
 458 Within well controlled incineration chambers an efficient burning can produce heat energy that
 459 can be utilized to produce steam and subsequently the electrical energy. Contrary to the latter,
 460 pyrolysis processes convert highly carbonaceous materials (like plastics) into useful chemicals
 461 and fuels, in the solid, liquid and gas forms. Both incineration and pyrolysis have advantages
 462 and disadvantages. Incineration destroys the plastic to produce energy that can be utilized as
 463 electrical power, which is not sustainable. Whereas, pyrolysis can transform the material into
 464 other useful forms and therefore is more sustainable. However, both incineration and
 465 combustion lead to toxic emissions through gas and the residues.

466 **Table 3: Heat of combustion some of the plastics found in waste stream**

Waste Plastic (s)	Heating value (MJ/kg)	Reference
PE	47.74	Lyon et al. (1998)
PP	45.8	
PS	43.65	
PVC	18	Costiuc et al. (2011)
PET	24.13	
ABS	39.84	
PC	31.30	
PMMA	26.81	
PCB	24.12	Areeprasert and Khaobang (2018)
ABS/PC	37.5	

467
 468 Proper gas filtration systems and careful handling of residual solids or ashes can make
 469 incineration processes an acceptable solution to dealing with a large spectrum of plastic wastes.
 470 On the contrary, narrow process windows coupled with consumption of energy for heating and

471 sorting out suitable feed restrict pyrolysis process to more specific and precisely defined
472 feedstock.

473 Hence, an in-situ generated supply of product fuel gas from the pyrolysis furnace could lead to
474 a cost effective pyrolysis process for the disposal of plastic waste. Pyrolysis products, such as
475 plastic derived oil, may fulfil a fraction of petroleum product demand due to the continuous
476 depletion of fossil fuel reserves. Thus, producing value-added oil and chemicals from plastics
477 waste by pyrolysis could be an efficient way to dispose of plastic wastes.

478 Heating the plastic under inert condition may lead to depolymerisation, breaking of long chain
479 polymeric chain into small chain hydrocarbons, which can be a source of petroleum products
480 and chemicals (Das and Tiwari, 2018b). Presence of plastics improves the MSW quality as it
481 improves the overall heating value of the MSW. Although garbage burning is not encouraged
482 due to emissions, it is one of the viable solutions for the huge accumulation of solid waste in
483 the natural habitats, especially when land is scarce and therefore landfilling is not an option.
484 The incineration/burning of e-waste plastics is or should not however be practiced as they
485 contain brominated and chlorinated components, such as BFRs, which may lead to severe toxic
486 emissions.

487 Vehlow *et al.* (Vehlow et al., 2000) mixed e-waste plastics with household MSW to find out
488 the toxic emission in the different exit streams from an incineration plant. Increasing the e-
489 waste plastic fraction in the feedstock increases organic compounds related to flame retardants,
490 such as poly brominated diphenylethers (PBDPE), polybrominated biphenyls (PBB), tetra-
491 bromo-bisphenol A (TBBA), as well as active elements like bromine (Br), chlorine (Cl) or
492 phosphorous (P). The chlorine and bromine elements were found more in the flue gas stream
493 than in the other exit streams, such as fly ash, grate ash, boiler ash, etc. The process' combustion
494 temperature influences the production of PCDD/Fs and PBDD/Fs. It was found that incomplete

495 combustion may results in more PCDD/Fs and PBDD/Fs than what is measured when it is
496 complete. The chances of emission of PCDD/Fs and PBDD/Fs are more when the combustion
497 takes place at low temperature whereas at a very high temperature (>600 °C) the Cl and Br get
498 reduced to HCl and HBr (Duan et al., 2011). Since incineration is a high temperature operation,
499 Cl and Br containing plastic may produce hydrogen halides which may corrode the equipment
500 and create serious problem in downstream plants.

501 **5.2 Pyrolysis of plastic waste**

502 As previously mentioned, pyrolysis is a process that turns organic material into gas, oil and
503 char thanks to degradation processes induced by the application of heat under an oxygen
504 starving environment. Pyrolysis end products can be valuable petroleum-like feedstock, which
505 can be treated in oil refineries for the synthesis of various chemicals and fuels. Under pyrolysis,
506 macromolecular structures of polymers present in plastic wastes are broken down into smaller
507 molecules and produce a wide range of hydrocarbons. Product distribution and quality of the
508 pyrolytic products depend primarily on temperature, heating rate, feedstock composition,
509 residence time, etc. (Williams and Williams, 1997; Das and Tiwari, 2018a). Furthermore, using
510 a particular type of catalyst and reactor design could influence the reaction rate and product
511 distribution.

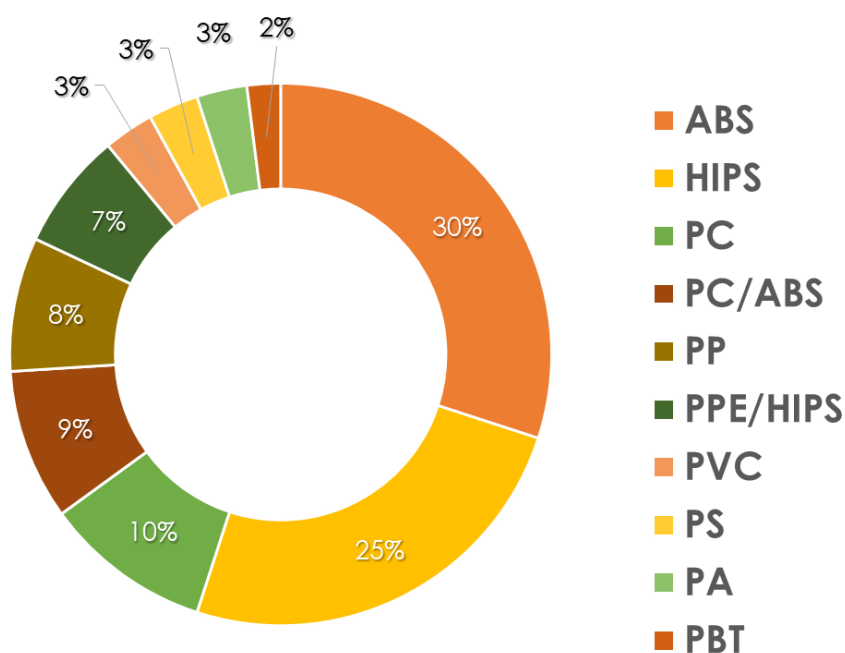
512 The impact of time and temperature on pyrolytic product distribution has been studied
513 extensively (Ma et al., 2002; López et al., 2011a; Xue et al., 2015; Singh and Ruj, 2016; Das
514 and Tiwari, 2018a, b). Pyrolysis temperatures of plastics were determined based on the material
515 degradation temperatures. Degradation temperatures of plastics have been evaluated using
516 thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) (Das and Tiwari, 2017). It was found out that the
517 degradation temperature of plastics increases with an increase in heating rate (Das and Tiwari,
518 2017). TGA coupled with Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (TG-FTIR) as well as
519 pyrolysis coupled with GCMS (Py-GC/MS) have been used to determine real-time

520 compositions of evolved gases during plastics' degradation under thermal stress (Fries et al.,
521 2013; Jin et al., 2016).

522 The feasibility of pyrolysis technology to convert waste plastics into valuable products has
523 been studied extensively and was adopted for industrial scale production. Hence, polyolefins
524 pyrolysis can produce more than 80% of liquid oil, which can be easily blended with
525 conventional oil (Das and Tiwari, 2018b). The quality of the liquid product can be improved
526 by post pyrolysis distillation to produce petroleum derivatives, including gasoline and diesel
527 grade fuel (Sharma et al., 2014). Dr Heinrich W. Smuda developed the Smuda process for the
528 pyrolysis of polyolefins waste to produce fuel at the temperature range of 300 – 450°C in
529 presence of catalyst made by silicates of iron, cobalt, nickel, magnesium, cadmium, copper,
530 chromium and zinc catalyst (Smuda, 2001). The Smuda process can tolerate high levels of non-
531 polyolefin plastics, such as PET, in which under heat decarboxylation can produce benzoic
532 acid and benzoate (Scheirs and Kaminsky, 2006). The PET increases the aromatic content of
533 the fuel oil. However, the PET is not considered in the pyrolysis process due to the formation
534 of troublesome terephthalic acid (TPA) that makes solid deposits in the downstream pipelines
535 and condensers. The presence of oxygen in the PET molecules results in the acidic component
536 of the liquid oil. Likewise, PVC plastics in the feed causes hydrochloric acid (HCl) production
537 (Williams and Williams, 1999). Material selectivity influences the product distribution of any
538 pyrolysis process.

539 The e-waste plastic stream is composed of different types of plastic, such as ABS, PS and PC
540 etc. (Fig. 7). Pyrolysis of polycarbonate (PC) produces phenolic components (Antonakou et
541 al., 2014) and pyrolysis of ABS and PS results in aromatic hydrocarbons, like styrene, ethyl
542 benzene (Rutkowski and Levin, 1986; Chaukura et al., 2016). PCBs have plastics as well as
543 organic epoxy in addition to its metallic fraction. Evangelopoulos et al. (Evangelopoulos et al.,
544 2015) investigated the degradation behaviour of PCBs in a temperature range of 400 – 900°C

545 by TGA and Py-GC/MS. It was observed that PCBs' decomposition starts at ~120°C and
 546 around 20 – 25 % of volatile matters was evolved at different temperature programs. Epoxy
 547 resins present in the PCBs decomposed along with other non-metallic components. The py-
 548 GC/MS detected a wide range of organic compounds that entailed brominated components (e.g.
 549 bromomethane, bromophenol), hydrocarbons, phenolic compounds and furans (e.g.
 550 benzofuran, 2methyl-benzofuran). Brominated molecules were produced due to the presence
 551 of significant amount of BFRs in the PCBs. It should be noted that a detailed analysis of the
 552 pyrolysis products from the pyrolysis of individual types of e-waste plastics with or without
 553 BFR is still lacking. Availability of such data would have a great influence in future
 554 development of processes for the disposal and recycling of e-waste plastics.

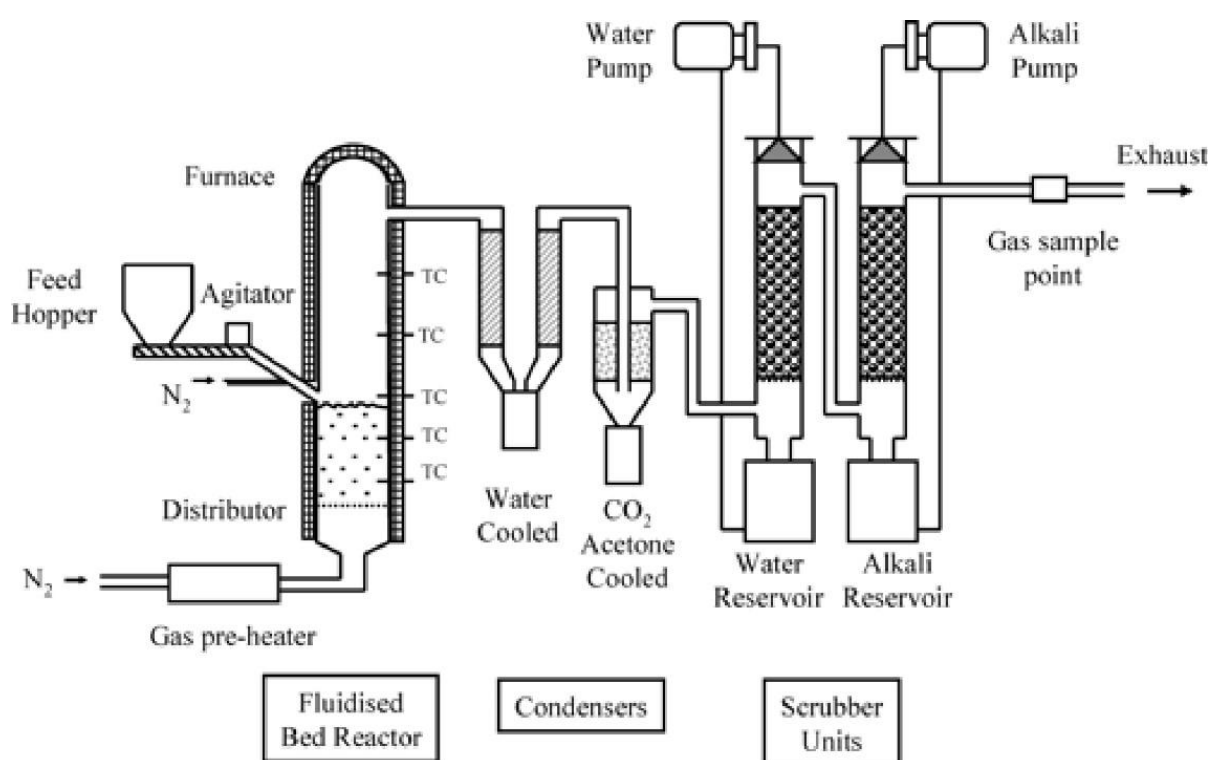


555

556 **Fig. 7: Typical composition of e-waste plastics in UK, 2006 (Keith Freegard; Alston et al.,**
 557 **2011)**

558 Hall and Williams (2006) performed pyrolysis of old computer monitor casing composed of
 559 ABS and PVC in a fast fluidised bed pyrolysis setup at 500°C. The pyrolysis reactor was
 560 externally heated by an electrical furnace and the fluidized media (N₂ gas) was preheated up to

561 450°C. To assist the fluidization, the feedstock was mixed with sand particles (300-425 μm)
 562 supported over a sieve plate. A schematic representation of the setup is displayed in Fig. 8. The
 563 fast pyrolysis of halogenated plastics produces halogenated organic components and hydrogen
 564 halides. These molecules are unwanted in the plastic derived oil for its usage as fuel. De-
 565 halogenation of the plastic sample seems to be a pre-requisite for fast pyrolysis although fast
 566 pyrolysis with catalyst can still be utilized for simultaneous degradation and de-halogenation
 567 of e-waste plastics (Sakata et al., 2003).



568
 569 **Fig. 8: Schematic representation of the fluidized bed pyrolysis reactor. Reprinted**
 570 **(adapted) with permission from (Energy Fuels 2006, 20, 4, 1536-1549). Copyright (2006)**
 571 **American Chemical Society (Hall and Williams, 2006)**

572 5.3 Catalytic pyrolysis of plastics

573 In conventional catalytic pyrolysis, catalysts are used to enhance the production of specific
 574 chemical components or to reduce the energy or time needed for degradation. A wide range of
 575 catalysts were mentioned in the literature, most of these catalysts are used extensively in the

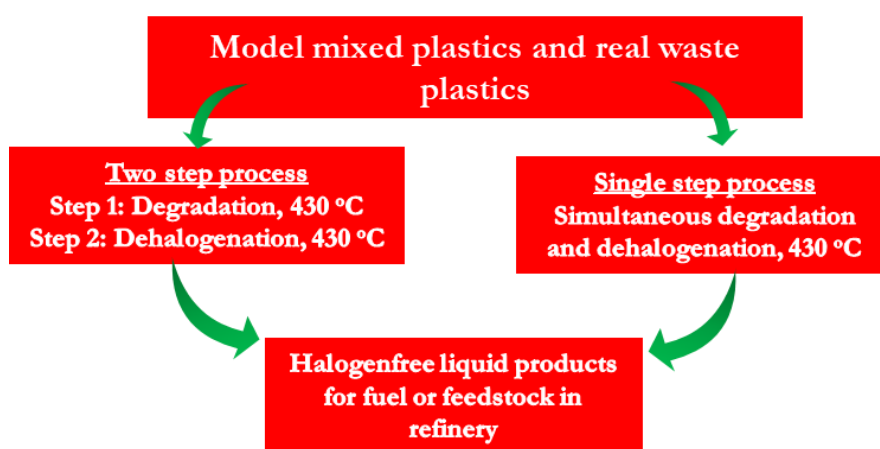
576 industry. The catalysts were categorised into homogeneous catalysts, acidic or non-acidic
577 mesoporous materials, zeolites, metallic oxides, smectite clays as well as their pillared
578 derivatives, etc. (Brebu et al., 2005; Lopez-Urionabarrenechea et al., 2012; De Stefanis et al.,
579 2013b). Zeolites (ZSM5, HZSM etc.) are effective in plastics degradation as discussed in
580 numerous past studies (George Manos, 2000; Ranbir Bagri, 2002).

581 López et al. (2011b) even used red mud, a Bauxite by-product waste from alumina production
582 industry, as a catalyst for waste plastics pyrolysis as it favours hydrogenation reactions, but the
583 high catalyst activity was only found at high temperatures ($>500^{\circ}\text{C}$). On the other hand, catalyst
584 like ZSM-5 was found to be active at lower temperature (440°C) and also to promote the
585 production of lighter hydrocarbons (gas/liquid) with high aromaticity. Still regarding
586 nanoporous aluminosilicates, De Stefanis et al. (2013a) reported three possible catalysts from
587 restructured smectite clays: saponite, montmorillonite and beidellite. Catalysts were
588 substantiated for their performance in the catalytic pyrolysis of a medium-density polyethylene.
589 Catalysts were able to reduce the temperature of cracking down to 300°C , as compared to
590 650°C or more for non-catalysed pyrolysis. In comparison to zeolites, clay based catalysts were
591 found superior in producing liquid hydrocarbon from plastic wastes as they favour the
592 production of liquid hydrocarbons in the gasoline and diesel range liquid from the polyethylene
593 plastics.

594 *5.3.1 Bromine fixation from BFR containing e-waste plastics degradation*

595 Hall and Williams (2007) performed pyrolysis experiments with brominated ABS plastics
596 originating from old computer monitor casings in a fluidised bed reactor system heated using
597 an externally heated furnace, an air preheater (450°C) for fluidizing the fine ($300 - 425 \mu\text{m}$)
598 sand particles used as bed material. The reactor was externally attached with condensers and
599 scrubbing systems. They successfully converted the Br-ABS waste into more than 91% of oil.
600 98% of the bromide was found in oil fraction and no bromine was found in the solid char one.

601 In catalytic pyrolysis, it is possible to fixate the bromine into different product stream (Ma et
 602 al., 2016b). Hence, catalytic pyrolysis is also utilized for simultaneous de-halogenation and
 603 degradation of e-waste plastics. Sakata et al. (2003) proposed iron oxide and calcium carbonate
 604 as the catalyst/sorbent for dehalogenation process. The process can follow two approaches (Fig.
 605 9). One approach advocated the degradation of plastics followed by dehalogenation of the
 606 halogenated products. In the other approach, both degradation and dehalogenation occurs
 607 simultaneously in presence of a suitable catalyst.



608

609 **Fig. 9: Two steps and single step dehalogenation and degradation of halogenated**
 610 **plastics (Sakata et al., 2003)**

611 Areprasert and Khaobang (2018) investigated the utilization of char obtained from e-waste as
 612 a green catalyst in the process of simultaneous debromination and pyrolysis of ABS/PC, PCB
 613 from e-waste. Although it is difficult to separate out Br from the pyrolysis product stream, the
 614 use of catalyst, one can modify brominated molecules from one stream (for example gas) in
 615 order to shift it to another stream (for example liquid). Chen et al. (2020) use Fe-Ni/MCM-41
 616 catalyst to recover the Br free oil fraction from the pyrolysis of BFR added e-waste plastics.
 617 Presence of Fe in the catalyst significantly reduces the HBr in the oil fraction whereas Ni helps
 618 in the reduction of $SbBr_3$ in the oil. Ma et al. (2016b) observed a 50% reduction of Bromine
 619 content in the oil product in presence of zeolite catalysts compared with the non-catalytic

620 thermal pyrolysis. Addition of catalyst resulted in decrease of bromine content in the oil but
621 simultaneously increased in wax and char residue. Table 4 compares the reduction of Bromine
622 content in the oil fraction using different catalysts when compared with non-catalytic pyrolysis.
623 PCB pyrolysis is an energy intensive process since their thermal decomposition is endothermic.
624 Guo et al. (2014) were able to recover 10.17 wt% gas, 18.23% of oil/tar and 71.60% of solid
625 residue by doing the low temperature (~500°C) pyrolysis of FR4 (epoxy composite) type PCBs.
626 The calorific values of gas and tar samples are 2.38 MJ/kg and 4.5 MJ/kg respectively, which
627 amounted around 35% of the total energy consumption for the pyrolysis. Gases such as CO,
628 CO₂ and 2-methyl propene, were major components of the gaseous fraction. Regarding the tar
629 fraction, it consisted of mostly phenols and alkyl aromatics along with brominated
630 hydrocarbons.

631

632 **Table 4: Effect of catalyst in the reduction of Br from the pyrolysis liquid product compare to the non-catalytic pyrolysis liquid product**

Catalyst	Material	% reduction of Br from the non-catalytic pyrolysis	Reference
Y-Zeolite	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	75%	Areeprasert and Khaobang (2018)
	PCB with BFR	8.1%	
ZSM-5	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	75%	
	PCB with BFR	7.7%	
Bio-char (BC)	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	60%	
	PCB with BFR	54%	
Electronic waste char (EWC)	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	81%	
	PCB with BFR	58.6%	
Iron oxide loaded Y-Zeolite (Fe/YZ)	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	81%	
	PCB with BFR	19%	
Iron oxide loaded ZSM-5 (Fe/ZSM-5)	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	89.1%	
	PCB with BFR	46.3%	
Iron oxide loaded biochar (Fe/BC)	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	90.5%	
	PCB with BFR	58.6%	
Iron oxide loaded electronic waste char (Fe/EWC)	Waste ABS+PC (80:20) with BFR	98.1%	
	PCB with BFR	70.9%	
Fe-Ni/MCM-41	Waste ABS with TBPPA+Sb ₂ O ₃	~60%	Chen et al. (2020)
Zeolite catalyst (HY)		~42%	Ma et al. (2016b)
Zeolite catalyst (Hβ)		~50%	
Zeolite catalyst (HZSM5)	Br-ABS	~39%	
MCM-41 (All silica)		~11%	
Al ₂ O ₃		~40%	

634 **5.4 Effect of pyrolysis reactor configuration**

635 We have seen that pyrolysis is a possible solution for e-waste plastics degradation and de-
636 halogenation. As discussed in the previous section, thermal treatment of e-waste plastics with
637 BFR can be carried out in three ways: Firstly, dehalogenation is followed by pyrolysis of e-
638 waste plastics; secondly, both dehalogenation and pyrolysis are performed simultaneously;
639 thirdly, contaminated plastics undergo pyrolysis which is followed by a product up-gradation
640 step to produce more useful products without toxins (Yang et al., 2013). For these approaches,
641 different reactor configurations were used including batch reactor, semi-batch reactor, catalytic
642 bed reactor, two-stage drop down reactor, fluidized bed reactor, rotary kiln reactor, screw kiln
643 reactor, etc. Industrially, batch, fluidized bed and rotary kiln reactors are commonly considered
644 for waste plastic pyrolysis.

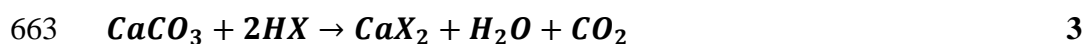
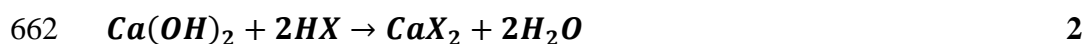
645 *5.4.1 Batch/semi-batch reactors*

646 Batch/semi-batch reactors are often used in the laboratory scale studies as they enable to easily
647 maintain reaction conditions, such as temperature and pressure. For example, Hall and
648 Williams (2008) performed catalytic pyrolysis in a batch reactor and examined the potentials
649 of zeolite based catalyst in the process of removing brominated organic compounds from the
650 oil products. They reported that zeolites: (i) significantly reduced the brominated organic
651 components within the pyrolysis oil when treating BFR containing ABS and HIPS; (ii) but at
652 the same time however, deteriorated the overall product quality by reducing the production of
653 valuable chemicals, such as styrene and cumene.

654 *5.4.2 Fluidized bed reactors*

655 Jung et al. (2012) mixed shredded particles of Br-ABS from e-waste plastics with Calcium-
656 based additives, such as calcium oxide, calcium hydroxide and oyster shells, and carried out
657 the pyrolysis experiment in a fluidized bed reactor. The Ca-based absorbents were able to
658 neutralize the hydrogen halide (X) formed due to the pyrolysis at 400°C of halogen containing

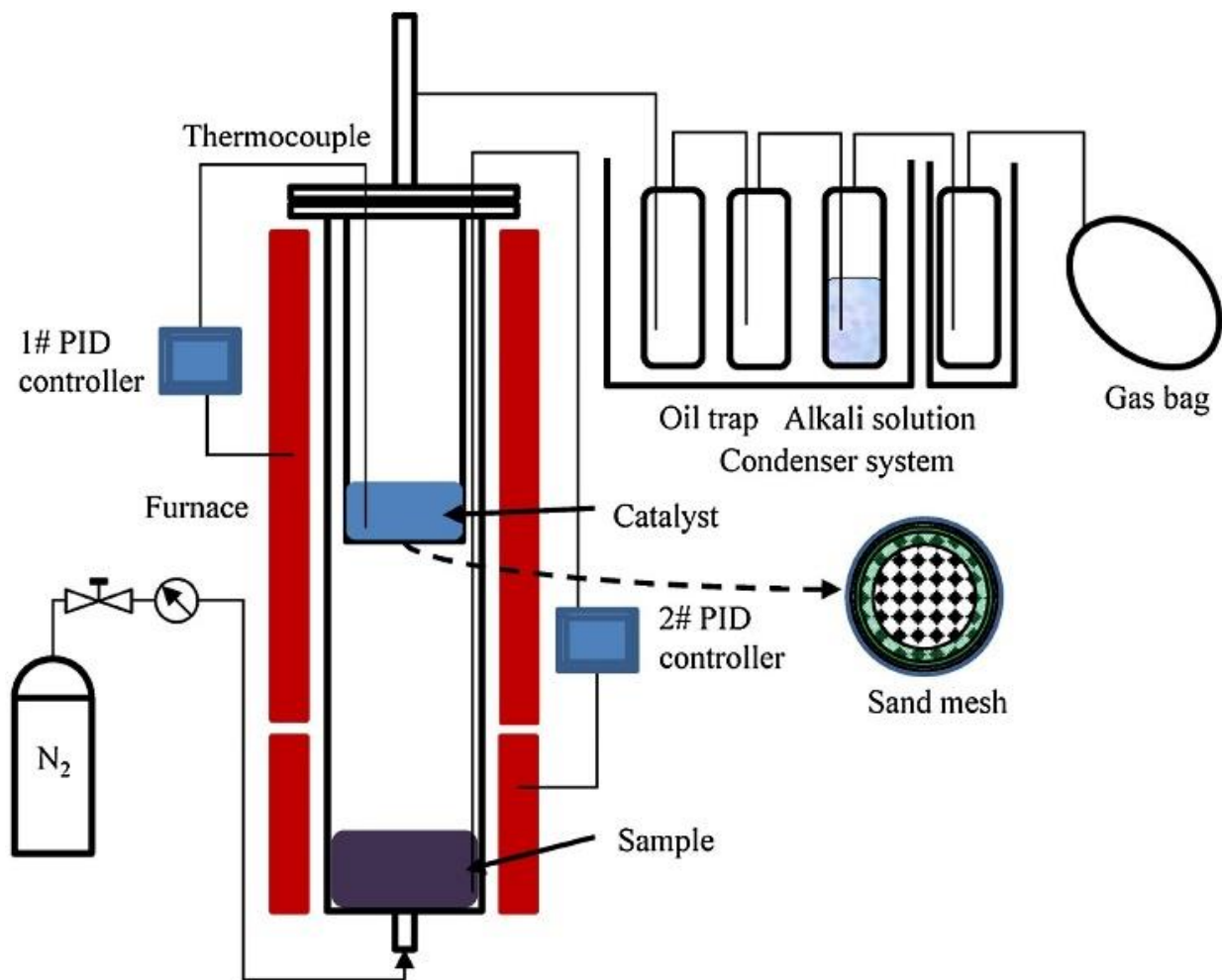
659 plastics (Br, Cl). The following reactions (Eq. 1 – Eq. 3) explain the reaction mechanism of the
660 dehalogenation process.



664 Where X = Cl or Br

665 *5.4.3 Two stage pyrolysis reactors*

666 Two-stage reactors were used in which the pyrolysis reaction occurs in the first stage and the
667 evolve gases passes through a catalytic bed in the second stage (Williams and Chishti, 2000;
668 Ratnasari et al., 2017). Ratnasari et al. (2017) performed pyrolysis experiments in a two stage
669 pyrolysis unit where in the second stage, a multi-layered structured mesoporous (MCM41)
670 catalyst stacked on top of a micro-porous catalyst (ZSM5) layer to ensure more gasoline type
671 hydrocarbon production from waste plastics. Two stages reactors are also utilized for the
672 catalytic pyrolysis and bromine removal of the non-metallic fractions of waste PCBs. Ma and
673 Kamo (2018) applied low cost Fe and Ni catalysts in a two stage fixed bed reactor for the
674 pyrolysis of waste PCBs and reported that Fe particles have excellent bromine removal
675 efficiencies from the pyrolysis product. The schematic representation of the two stage fixed
676 bed pyrolysis setup is shown in Fig. 10.



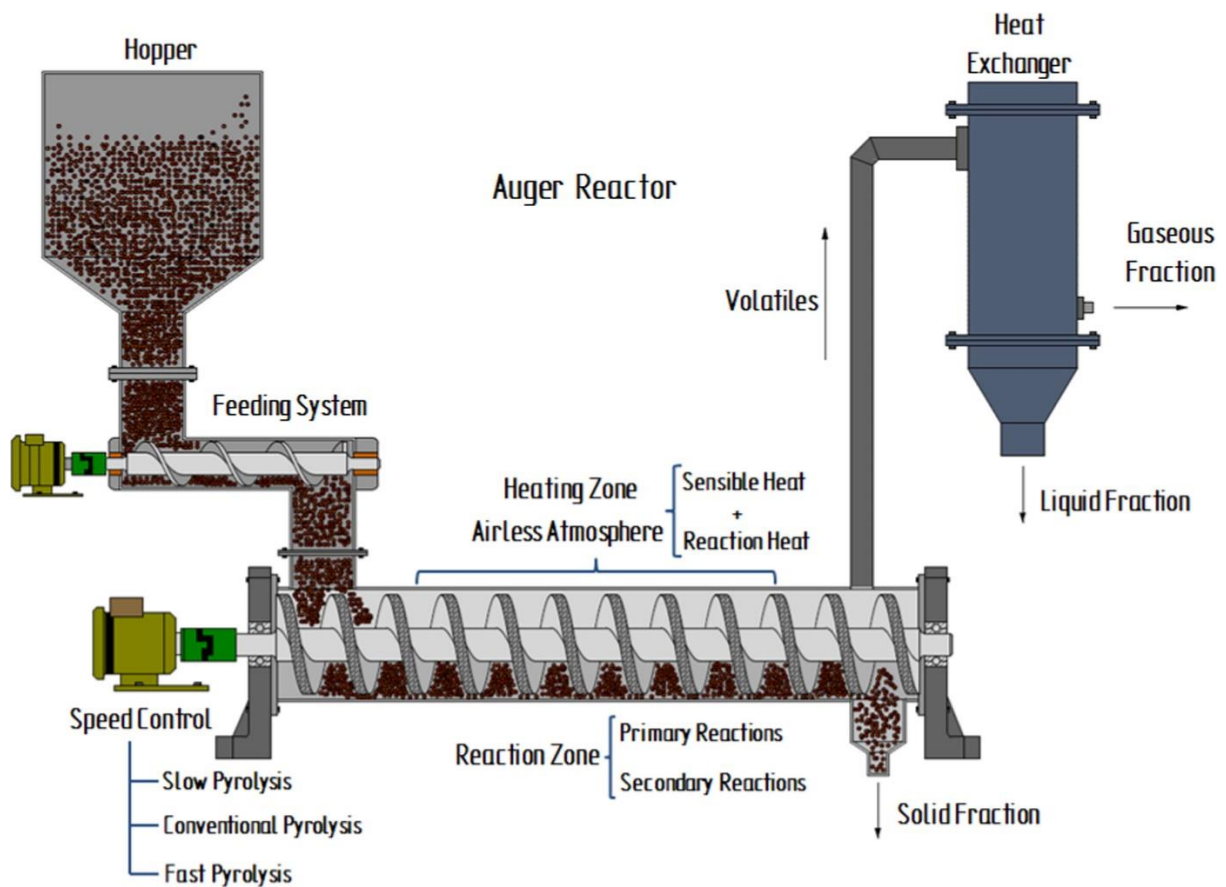
677

678 **Fig. 10: Schematic representation of the two-stage fixed-bed reactor system.**(Ma and
 679 **Kamo, 2018)** [Reprinted from the article: *C. Ma and T. Kamo, Journal of Analytical and*
 680 *Applied Pyrolysis, 134, (2018) 614, with permission from Elsevier]*

681 *5.4.4 Auger (screw kiln) reactor*

682 As reported recently, low temperature pyrolysis of carbonaceous material, such as plastics,
 683 with long holding times undergoes consecutive degradation to produce lighter hydrocarbon
 684 liquid fractions (Das and Tiwari, 2018b). However, at high temperature, ultra-pyrolysis
 685 (flash/fast pyrolysis) indulges more production of gaseous hydrocarbon (Alvarez et al., 2015;
 686 Lopez et al., 2017). Slow pyrolysis experiments were conducted mostly in batch or semi-batch
 687 reactors. For continuous production, a screw kiln reactors/auger reactors can be used for low
 688 to moderate temperature pyrolysis. Auger reactors use a screw to convey the feedstock down

689 the length of the externally heated tube (Campuzano et al., 2019). The temperature of the
 690 reactor can be programmed to vary along the length of the reactor tube. A typical auger reactor
 691 used for the pyrolysis of biomass is shown in Fig. 11 (Campuzano et al., 2019).



692

693 **Fig. 11: Single-auger reactor for pyrolysis of biomass** [Reprinted from the article:
 694 *Campuzano, Felipe Brown, Robert C. Martínez, Juan Daniel, Auger reactors for pyrolysis*
 695 *of biomass and wastes, Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 102, (2019) 372, with*
 696 **permission from Elsevier**

697 *5.4.5 Microwave assisted pyrolysis*

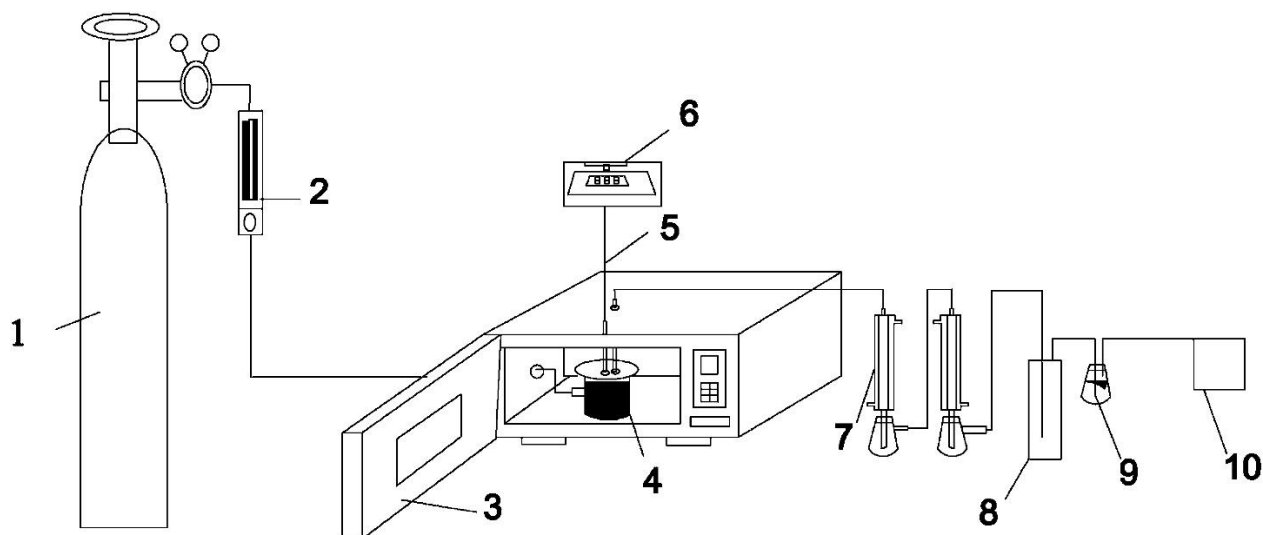
698 In microwave pyrolysis, microwaves are used as the energy source. Microwave are
 699 electromagnetic waves with wavelength ranging between 1 mm and 1 m (Undri et al., 2013).
 700 Materials like water, biomass, metals and carbon particles, are considered good microwave
 701 absorbers (dielectric materials). Polymers and plastics are transparent to microwave because
 702 they have low microwave absorption capacity (Cheng and Hu, 2010). However, these latter

703 materials can undergo pyrolysis by mixing them with dielectric ones, such as carbon particles
704 or metal particles, in a microwave reactor. The control of pyrolysis temperature in microwave
705 heating is however tricky due to the formation of hot spots during heating caused by localized
706 microwave field that are due to the difference in dielectric properties of the various material
707 and large wavelength of the radiation (Undri et al., 2013).

708 Microwave heating has been used for pyrolysis of biomass (Zhao et al., 2012; Zhang et al.,
709 2017), waste plastics (Ludlow-Palafox and Chase, 2001), scrap tyres (Undri et al., 2013) and
710 electronic waste (Sun et al., 2011). Aishwarya and Sindhu (2016) successfully carried out the
711 pyrolysis of simulated plastic mixtures in a microwave assisted pyrolyser which had a power
712 of 5 kW and was integrated with 4 magnetron generating microwaves continuously. Ludlow-
713 Palafox and Chase (2001) successfully recovered aluminium and hydrocarbons from high
714 density polyethylene and aluminium/polymer laminates (empty toothpaste tubes) by
715 microwave induced pyrolysis in a semi-batch reactor using carbon particles as microwave
716 absorbing materials. Hussain et al. (2012) used a microwave heating aluminium coil reactor
717 for the pyrolysis of waste polystyrene into useful products. The heating was controlled by
718 changing the size and shape of the metal reactor. Major factors affecting the microwave
719 pyrolysis include the feedstock's properties, feeding pattern, heating program, microwave
720 power, microwave power delivery, reactor design, susceptor type, catalytic properties of the
721 susceptors and other reaction conditions. A typical microwave assisted pyrolysis setup is shown
722 in Fig. 12 (Sun et al., 2011).

723

724



725

726 **Fig. 12: Diagram of the reactor system for microwave-induced pyrolysis of WPCBs: (1)**
 727 **nitrogen cylinder, (2) rotameter, (3) microwave oven, (4) quartz reactor, (5)**
 728 **thermocouple, (6) data collection, (7) condensing system, (8) glass wool trap, (9) deionized**
 729 **water, (10) gas bag [Reprinted (adapted) with permission from (J. Sun, W. Wang, Z. Liu**
 730 **and C. Ma, *Industrial & Engineering Chemistry Research*, 50, (2011) 11763.]. Copyright**
 731 **(2011) American Chemical Society."]**

732 6 Conclusion and outlooks

733 The recovery of toxic free plastics from e-waste plastics is an interesting field of waste
 734 utilization and conversion. An extensive amount of studies of thermochemical conversion of
 735 waste plastics have been carried out in recent years and many significant technological
 736 advances have been achieved. However, a pyrolytic solution is still lacking that is capable of
 737 dealing with waste quantities as large as the ones that can be treated using conventional waste
 738 treatments, such as incineration and land filling. Major hurdle for plastic pyrolysis is the non-
 739 homogeneity of plastic waste. Plastics like PVC and PET in the feedstock can lead to different
 740 types of end products compared with polyolefin based plastics. On the other hand, plastic
 741 wastes from WEEEs contain various types of plastics including styrene based plastics (ABS,
 742 HIPS), polycarbonates, polyamides and polyolefins containing environmentally harmful
 743 toxins, such as BFRs and heavy metals. Special attention is needed to recover the non-toxic

744 plastics from such e-waste plastics. Extraction processes of BFRs from the latter have been
745 studied extensively with different solvents, such as methanol, propanol, hexane, etc., with good
746 extraction efficiencies. However, it is advisable to do extractions of toxins in a sustainable way
747 by using green technology, such as using supercritical CO₂ as solvent, bio solvents, ionic
748 liquids, etc.

749 Pyrolysis of e-waste plastics have been performed particularly with various catalyst based on
750 different metals, such as Ni, Fe, Ca, Mg etc, which might help in reducing the brominated
751 organic hydrocarbon content in pyrolysis products. Pyrolysis is one of the most recommended
752 technique in the treatment of e-waste plastics to convert them into value added products,
753 however complete detoxification of e-waste plastics by pyrolysis remains the limiting factor.

754 The scope of utilizing thermochemical conversion of e-waste plastic into oil and chemicals is
755 significant and helps to deal with the massive and global problem of plastic as well as e-wastes.

756 The pros

757 **Declaration of competing interest**

758 The Authors have no conflict of interest between them.

759 **Acknowledgement:**

760 Authors would like to thank financial support from National Research Foundation, Prime
761 Minister's Office, Singapore, the Ministry of National Development, Singapore, and National
762 Environment Agency, Ministry of the Environment and Water Resource, Singapore under the
763 Closing the Waste Loop R&D Initiative as part of the Urban Solutions & Sustainability –
764 Integration Fund (Award No. USS-IF-2018-4).

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