New research has examined three different categories of Ecologic Risk Assessment (ERA), each with different goals. The researchers find that overlaps between the three assessments could be combined to create a more comprehensive form of ERA, usable by regulators and environmental decision makers.

Transnational environmental crime is notoriously difficult to control. Intelligence-led policing (ILP) has been suggested as one way of tackling the complex issue. This study assessed the use of ILP to prevent the illegal export of e-waste in the UK. The authors found that ILP successfully generated intelligence to address the problem and recommend that cross-border ILP be established to tackle environmental crime in Europe.

Transnational crimes involve movement across national borders. Examples of such offences, defined as crimes in which 'offenders or victims are located in or operate through more than one country', include human trafficking and terrorism. In the environmental arena, it includes the illegal trade and smuggling of plants, animals, resources and pollutants, with risks including habitat destruction, species decline and pollution.

Tackling the problem poses many challenges, due to the scale of trade and number of people involved, which often means there are many smaller, interconnected crimes to deal with. Transnational crime is also complicated by the varying legal requirements of different countries.

There is a pressing need for new approaches to intervention. This study evaluated one such approach — intelligence-led policing (ILP) — whereby agencies collect information about crime to react in a strategic and targeted way.

As a case study, the researchers focused on the UK Environment Agency (EA) Securing Compliant Waste Exports project, which aimed to reduce illegal exports of electronic waste (E-waste), such as computers. It is illegal in the EU to export hazardous materials found in waste electrical equipment to countries that do not belong to the OECD. The UK therefore prohibits the export of hazardous wastes for disposal, and limits the export of electrical equipment intended for other purposes (such as re-use).

The researchers used qualitative methods (interviews with the leadership team) and quantitative data describing the intelligence process to assess how the programme was implemented. They used a method called 'process evaluation' which is used to assess the effectiveness of agency’s operations, implementation and service delivery.

Through the project, the agency developed a range of preventative measures including compliance letters, stop shipment notices and formal prosecution. During the period of study (June–November 2009), 21 notices were served (either to stop a shipment for inspection or return it to the exporter), 39 compliance letters were sent and 67 investigations were initiated. To target resources as effectively as possible, cases were prioritised based on the number of organisations involved and scale of the illegal exports.
Although the project was successfully implemented, there were some challenges along the way, including limited resources, time-consuming data processing, resistance to new ways of thinking and developing accurate metrics of success. The team was largely able to overcome these challenges, although some insurmountable obstacles were faced when the project was translated to an international scale (the agency was asked to lead a newly formed INTERPOL Global E-Waste Crime Group). These challenges included a lack of virtual communication, lack of secure data storage and lack of adequate legislation to prosecute in some countries.

Overall however the agency was fully able to implement ILP and meet UK National Intelligence Model requirements. The EA linked regulatory and enforcement information to develop risk registers which could guide further intelligence gathering and limited investigation resources. The study suggests that administrative and enforcement data can be combined to generate actionable intelligence, and that it is feasible to use ILP to address transnational environmental crime.

For the future, the study recommends that researchers collaborate with law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, given the legal basis for EU coordination and cooperation, the researchers suggest it would be useful to establish cross-border ILP in Europe.