

Chinese Waste Import Restrictions/Impacts on State and Local Recycling Programs: June 12th Solid Waste Association of North American Update



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The Solid Waste Association of North America (“SWANA”) issued what it describes as an “update” on the topic of:

China Waste Import Restrictions and Impacts on State and Local Recycling Programs (“Update”)

SWANA describes itself as “an organization of more than 10,000 public and private sector professionals committed to advancing from solid waste management to resource management through their shared emphasis on education, advocacy and research.”

China had previously put in place a ban of the import of certain scrap materials. The ban took effect in January 2018 and applied to 24 categories of scrap and recyclables. In March 2018 a 0.5% contamination standard was implemented.

The issue is critical because demand is obviously a driver of recycling growth. China has had significant importance in terms of scrap and recyclable demand because of its status as the largest importer of such materials in the world.

The SWANA *Update* is intended to provide an overview of the effect that the Chinese restrictions are having on the export of recyclables from the United States and Canada. This analysis includes what it describes as the increased movement of material to southeast Asian countries and additional potential restrictions.

SWANA notes that the Chinese restrictions have caused a dramatic decline in the amount of scrap and recyclables exported from the United States to China. Its Update includes a graph illustrating the impact on both mixed paper and scrap plastics.

The SWANA *Update* states that other countries, primarily in Asia, have increased their import of these materials from the United States and other countries. In recent months several of these countries (citing Vietnam and Indonesia) are stated to have announced measures to reduce the flow of recyclables into their ports. Graphs are included to illustrate the change in the amount of scrap paper and plastics to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The *Update* also identifies what it characterizes as SWANA's aggressive steps to respond to the Chinese restrictions. They are stated to include:

- Establishment of a Recycling Task Force consisting of industry and municipal leaders from the United States and Canada to guide SWANA's response
- Identifying best practices for reducing contamination of curbside recyclables
- Creating demand for recycled content
- Requesting that Congress include support for recycling in the Infrastructure bill
- Working with other recycling stakeholders to amplify messages/concerns
- Providing education on the impact of the Chinese waste import restrictions at online and in-person events

A copy of the [Update](#) can be downloaded here.