

Plastic overload: China bans overseas plastic scraps from US and around world

Now there is an overload of America's waste inside storage facilities nationwide.

[Ashley Curtin](#) / [NationofChange](#) / News Report - March 19, 2018



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Plastic waste keeps piling up and the United States has no where to send it. With China's new ban on overseas plastic scraps and a lack of domestic plastic processing facilities nationwide, the U.S. is trying to deal with the excess scrap piling up.

China "filed [a notice](#) with the World Trade Organization announcing its decision to stop importing 24 types of foreign waste and to dramatically tighten its standards for impurities in scrap bales" in July of 2017, the Sierra Club reported.

"We found that large amounts of dirty wastes or even hazardous wastes are mixed in the solid waste that can be used as raw materials," China's Ministry of Environment Protection said. "This has polluted China's environment seriously."

The notice outlined the types of banned scraps to include "plastics waste from living sources, vanadium slag, unsorted waste paper, and waste textile materials." The Chinese government also announced its plan to "[completely ban plastic waste imports in 2019](#)," the Sierra Club reported.

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While China was the world's largest importer of solid waste in the 1980s to feed its growing economy, the government has now blamed "environmental damage" of the imports for the main reason for its ban.

"In periods of development in the past, parts of imported solid waste have served (China) to some extent, but as China advances economically and socially, we see problems exposed in importing solid waste for raw materials," Guo Jiang, the head of the environment protection ministry's Department of International Cooperation, said.

But China has been moving in this "green" direction starting in 2013 when the country launched the Green Fence campaign, "which prohibited unsorted shipments of recyclables from overseas," the Sierra Club reported. And as recent as March 2017, the country began conducting investigations into the nine major ports that imported overseas scraps under the National Sword initiative.

The U.S. exported up to 40 percent of its plastic scraps to China yearly. But with this ban in place, America's scraps are now being transferred to Vietnam or Malaysia. According to the Sierra Club, "scrap exports from September 2017 through January 2018, compared to the same period of time in 2016, shows a 95 percent increase of scrap paper going to Vietnam, and a 138 percent increase in plastic scrap going to Malaysia."

While excess scrap continues to pile up in the U.S., there is a lack of domestic plastic processing facilities. A new recycling plant hasn't been built in the U.S. since 2003, according to The Washington Post.

The last bales of scraps the U.S. was able to ship to China without being rejected were shipped between September and October. Now there is an overload of America's waste inside storage facilities nationwide. As many facilities wait for the scraps to be redirected to domestic or foreign

facilities, it's starting to hurt many domestic facilities' budgets.

"China practically gave us no time to adjust, no time to transition," said Adina Adler, a senior official at the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries.

With no official plan in place, many are being proactive in finding a solution.

"There are resources in the U.S. and Canada that people are starting to scout out now," Adler said.