



Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

# News Release

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## **China's Import Restrictions are Disrupting Oregon's Recycling Markets Oregonians can help by stopping "wishful recycling"**

PORTLAND, ORE. – In July, China proposed a global ban to stop accepting post-consumer plastics and unsorted paper by January 1, 2018. The announcement, coupled with earlier import restrictions on these materials, has severely disrupted recycling markets worldwide with major impacts in Oregon. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is working closely with local governments, collectors, recycling processors and industry representatives on short term solutions to problems caused by China's abrupt actions – and planning longer term changes to update our recycling systems to recycle effectively in new market conditions.

Until recently, China has been the world's largest importer of recycled paper and plastics – including most of Oregon's mixed paper and plastics. In March, China imposed severe restrictions on imports in large part due to high levels of contamination, which are any items that are not accepted for recycling in a particular recycling program or don't belong in materials being recycled. In July, China announced total bans by 2018. As a result, recycling processors have slowed down sort lines to remove contaminants in an attempt to meet China's higher standards; processors are struggling to sell materials – and given Oregon's strong recycling ethic – the amount of material collected for recycling is not slowing down.

Even with these strains on our recycling system, DEQ and its partners are working hard to find ways to continue recycling as much as possible. But in circumstances where no markets exist or costs for recycling are determined to be prohibitive, DEQ may approve requests to dispose of materials collected for recycling for a temporary period of time. While no one wants disposal of recyclable materials, there may be no other options as materials continue to pile up at processing facilities with no additional room for incoming materials. DEQ has already received requests for disposal and anticipates more requests in the near future.

In the meantime, residents are encouraged to continue recycling, but to stop "wishful recycling" which is putting an item into a recycling container that doesn't belong, wishing it will be recycled. Any item that is dirty or not on the list of materials accepted for recycling leads to contamination. Residents can find out what items are accepted by checking with their local provider. A good mantra to follow is, "when in doubt find out!" Oregonians can also help by reducing waste and reusing items when possible.

To learn more about the proposed ban, DEQ's response and how residents can help reduce contamination, visit <http://www.oregon.gov/deq/mm/Pages/Recycling-Markets.aspx>.