



Recycling Rescue Contamination Intervention Needed to Save Recycling

Richmond, VA - In July 2017, China, the largest international importer of recyclable materials from the United States, notified the World Trade Organization (WTO) that it would impose a ban on the import of 24 categories of solid waste, including plastic, mixed paper and textiles beginning January 2018. In addition, on March 1, 2018, the Chinese government implemented stricter technical standards for scrap imports, allowing only shipments that meet very strict thresholds for allowable contaminants to be imported. ^{1,2}

"Does this mean that recycling, as we know it, is dead? Absolutely not," said Teresa Sweeney, Chair of the Virginia Recycling Association (VRA). "The VRA sees this as a reality check for product manufacturers to improve their packaging, for the recycling industry to improve their sorting technology, for everyone who works with the public to improve recycling information and for consumers to reduce their waste and recycle responsibly."

"Recycling is not going away. Space in our landfills is limited and we must continue to reduce the amount of solid waste that is sent there. The average remaining capacity for landfills in Virginia is only 23 years, according to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.³ The idea of digging a bigger hole to resolve our recycling issues is a non-starter. Consider this: the length of time it takes for an aluminum can to decompose in a landfill is 200 years. A recycled aluminum can be back on the shelf in a little as 60 days. "

"Recycling is a smarter option, in conjunction with actual waste reduction," adds Sweeney.

"The main problem with recycling is contamination. We must work harder to provide clear direction and make recycling the right thing easier for everyone." said Sweeney "Many 'wishful recyclers' put items into recycling containers for collection that really should be donated, recycled another way or thrown in the trash."

"The VRA's advice is to keep it simple. Generally, #1 and #2 plastic bottles, jugs and food containers, along with tin and aluminum cans and cardboard can be placed in recycling containers. However, check with your local jurisdiction for

guidelines on what can be recycled where, in your community. Once you know what is being recycled and where to place it, be sure to empty the containers and keep paper products dry. This will help reduce contamination and improve the quality of the recycling materials generated."

Figures obtained from the Institute of Scrap and Recycling Industries state that Virginia's recycling industry generates approximately \$2 billion in revenue and employs over 8,500 workers. These businesses contribute to the local economy by creating and supporting jobs and services. Recycling creates up to seven times more jobs per ton than landfilling. Recycling also preserves landfill space and natural resources.

"One thing we all have to remember is that recycling is an industry," said Sweeney. "The current market conditions will force a change or possibly closure of some of these businesses, but there is something Virginians can do."

"On average, every person in the US generates 4.5 pounds of trash and recycling every day. By recycling more responsibly, you contribute to the preservation of our environment, support local industry and preserve landfill space for future generations."

Visit www.vrarecycles.org to learn more about the Virginia Recycling Association and recycling in Virginia.

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About The Virginia Recycling Association

The Virginia Recycling Association (VRA) provides leadership in sustainable recycling and resource management in Virginia. VRA is the leading resource of recycling information for our members, the general public, the Virginia General Assembly, local government, business, and industry. For more information visit www.vrarecycles.org

References

¹ *China's Scrap Trade Policy, Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries. Retrieved from <http://www.isri.org/advocacy-compliance/china>*

² *Bodamer, David. (2017, July 19). China Notifies WTO of Intent to Ban 24 Types of Solid Waste Imports. Waste360. Retrieved from <https://www.waste360.com/recycling/china-notifies-wto-intent-ban-24-types-solid-waste-imports>*

³ *2018 Annual Solid Waste Report for CY2017. Virginia DEQ, 2018, pp. 7–8. Retrieved from*

<https://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Land/SolidWaste/2017swiareport.pdf?ver=2018-06-29-114220-023>