



For immediate release

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INCREASING PLASTICS WASTE EXPORTED TO FAR EAST

From 1 August 2009, the Chinese authorities accepted the import of additional plastics waste into their country. They will allow the import of ethylene, styrene, PVC, PET bottles and CD-ROM scraps. This new policy will deteriorate the fragile state in which European recyclers are found. From 2000 to 2008, the European exports of plastics waste have risen by 250%, reaching 2.27 million tonnes – approximately 5 million tonnes are annually recycled in Europe. 87% of these exports are going to China (including Hong Kong). The financial downturn seems to have worsened the situation, as the first quarter of 2009 has seen a 33% increase in export compared to the previous year.

Some of the European collection systems directly or indirectly support plastics waste exports to the Far East. From a sustainability point of view, this policy can be questioned.

First, from an environmental viewpoint, the export of the European plastics waste to be treated in the Far East is far from being a sound policy. The greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increase significantly if the plastics waste is recycled in the Far East compared to Europe. As a matter of fact, additional GHG emissions are due to additional transport involved (going as a waste and returning as a product) and to the inefficient energy mix of these countries. According to a recent study,¹ 'recycling nearly 300,000 tonnes of PET bottles into fibre in Europe, rather than in China, cuts global emissions by a further 175,000 tonnes a year'.

Second, there is a tax flow from Europe to the Far East. The European tax payers are financially penalised for every products they buy (Green Dot fee passed to the customer) and throw (garbage bag tax). This huge amount of money should be used to increase the collection systems' efficiency, permitting better recycling rates at a lower cost and with a lower environmental impact. However, at present, part of this money indirectly supports the Far East recyclers who have lower costs than the European ones.

Third, the social conditions in the Far East are far from being comparable to European standards. From an ethical point of view, Europeans cannot tolerate that their waste is treated by companies that do not apply with European social standards, working security and, in the worst cases, child labour.

Environmental, social and economic variables constitute the three sustainability pillars. The waste export policy does not fulfil any of these essential variables. Thus, European waste export should be limited, and local treatment should be favoured.

EuPR calls for the European collection systems to act in a sustainable way by reducing the export of plastics waste to the Far East and by supporting their local treatment.



EuPR is the professional representative body of plastics recyclers in Europe. EuPR promotes plastics mechanical recycling and conditions that enable profitable and sustainable business, while offering a service platform to its members. EuPR members constitute 80% of the European recycling capacity, processing more than 5 million tonnes of collected plastics per year.

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¹ Wellman International Limited