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China bans imports of plastic bag, film waste

By Nina Ying Sun

Recycling industry "only given a few weeks' notice" of the ban.

3 March 2008 - China, the world's largest destination for plastic waste, is shutting its doors to shipments of flexible plastics waste.

Starting 1 March, the country will ban imports of "used plastic bags, film and web," according to a recent bulletin issued by China's State Environmental Protection Administration, together with four other ministries: the National Development and Reform Commission; Ministry of Commerce, China Customs; and the Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine.

Toland Lam, president of the Recycling Committee of the Beijing-based China Plastics Processing Industry Association (CPPIA) said: "We were only given a few weeks' notice." He added: "We still don't know what to make of this news, but the government seems to set the standards too high," he said in a speech at the Plastics Recycling 2008 conference, held 26-27 February in Jacksonville.

Tony Tan - vice president of CPPIA's Recycling Committee - said in a speech at the same conference: "The Customs personnel don't have enough knowledge of plastics to tell whether a container of plastic waste is recyclable or not; they also are aware of some trading companies smuggling waste into China. To solve these problems, they might as well just cut it off overall."

The news triggered concern among the 600-plus attendees, and CPPIA immediately arranged to visit Chinese authorities to discuss the decision.

"We would like to report widely collected responses from both Chinese and foreign companies in the industry," CPPIA's request letter said.

The trade group also is bringing some North American counterparts to Beijing for dialogue with the government, according to Kathy Xuan, vice president of CPPIA's Recycling Committee.

"We hope to get an explanation, as the ban doesn't elaborate itself in terms of details," she said in a telephone interview. "We also hope to facilitate better communication between the Chinese authorities and the global recycling industry."

Xuan is founder and president of recycler Parc Corp. of North Aurora, Ill, which has factories in North Aurora and Qingdao, China.

Meantime, officials at major ports said they will not accept shipments of flexible plastic packaging waste starting 1 March, if the central government does not issue further instructions.

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