

In July of 2017 China announced that it would ban imports of 24 categories of solid waste, including certain types of plastics, paper and textiles beginning in January of 2018. This import ban is titled National Sword and on top banning certain materials it also sets a much higher standard for contamination levels – for most commodities the threshold is less than 0.5 %. This threshold is much lower than current standards and almost impossible to reach without investments in new technology or reduced contamination from consumer recycling streams.

In recent years Oregon has sent the majority of postconsumer plastics and paper to China because of lower labor and shipping costs. It is cheaper to ship some materials to China than transport them a fraction of the distance domestically by road or rail because importers take advantage of the otherwise empty containers leaving US ports by filling them with recyclable materials. This has led to a heavy reliance on China to import our recycled materials and caused our domestic processing operations to stagnate.

Domestic material recovery facilities are now looking at emerging markets elsewhere such as India, Pakistan or Southeast Asia, but it is unclear how much volume these markets can handle and how much it will cost to ship material to them. Creating a more robust domestic processing industry is also an option, but it could take years for processing capacity to keep pace with the amount of post-consumer waste being generated. The harsh reality is that there is no clear plan to move forward.

The National Sword has already caused paper and plastic to pile up at material recovery facilities in Oregon and across the nation. To combat this DEQ is issuing disposal concurrences to landfill items on their principle materials list. To address this Marion County, with the help of industry stakeholders, has issued a change to the recyclable materials list.

The most significant things consumers can do to make a positive impact in the recycling market today is keeping their recycling bins free of contaminants (including non-recyclable plastics) and making sure the items are free of food residue. When items are recycled we urge consumers to remember our *Empty, Clean, and Dry* campaign and check with their local city and county guidelines for recyclable materials.