



DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES RECYCLING AND RECOVERY

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In light of recent changes to China's import policies, I'm writing to share an update on California's recycling markets, answer questions regarding jurisdiction compliance, emphasize the importance of health and safety at solid waste facilities, and discuss what lies ahead. On May 4th, China stopped accepting any imports of recyclable materials from the United States for one month. This decision follows China's implementation of its National Sword policy on March 1st, banning the imports of 24 categories of scrap materials including low grade plastics and unsorted mixed paper, and setting strict contamination standards for allowable bales of recyclable material. The exporting of recyclable commodities to China, primarily our traditional curbside materials, has historically been a key component of California's recycling infrastructure. Approximately two thirds of curbside collected material is exported to foreign markets. In 2016, 62 percent of the exported recyclable materials were sent to China. However, China's implementation of National Sword is a major disruption in recycling commodities markets, a signal that California can no longer be primarily reliant on exports to manage our recyclable materials.

These new policies provide California with an opportunity to take a couple of important steps: first, to reduce our waste, and second, to work together to build infrastructure and domestic markets to successfully and responsibly manage our recyclable materials. Each of these will take investment and collaboration across state and local governments, the solid waste industry, manufacturers, and rate-payers. These are critical steps to improve the environment and economy here in California and beyond, although they will take time.

We're already witnessing the effect of China's new policy. Material flow is significantly disrupted and the economics of recycling are unfavorable for many recyclable commodities, challenging what recycling means to Californians.

This letter is intended to address concerns I have been hearing from local governments and industry about the impacts of China's import policies. I would like to reassure local governments that we have existing statutory policies to address the impact of markets when determining whether or not a jurisdiction has made a good faith effort to implement its diversion programs for compliance with AB 939. I am aware that facilities are having a hard time moving recyclable materials and are keeping them on site in significant quantities. If facilities are temporarily storing materials for longer periods, public health and safety should be their number one priority. Finally, looking toward the long-term, we will need more domestic infrastructure to manufacture products using California's recycled content feedstock. This valuable infrastructure will not only support the domestic recyclable commodities market but also support SB 1383's goal to reduce disposal of organic waste by 75 percent.



programs. If a jurisdiction has not been able to implement a commercial recycling program that is appropriate for the jurisdiction and meets the needs of its businesses, CalRecycle looks at a number of factors in assessing whether the jurisdiction has made a good faith effort to implement these programs. These factors include the impact of markets and the efforts the jurisdiction has made to investigate local and regional marketing options and recycling opportunities with the private sector. More specifics can be found in the CIWMP Enforcement Policy Part II, page 22 re: MCR and 28-29 re: MORE, and PRC 42649.3(i)(5) and 42649.82(h)(6) and 14 California Code of Regulations §18839.

Health and Safety Considerations Associated with Storage

We understand that National Sword is causing back-ups and longer storage times of processed recycled materials at solid waste facilities and recycling centers. Solid waste facility operators can discuss potential permitting options or request a Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency to grant a temporary waiver of storage restrictions. The waiver would allow additional amounts of recyclables and longer timeframes to store recyclables at the solid waste site as long as the additional storage does not create public health and safety or environmental issues. The process for requesting and processing a temporary waiver is found in state solid waste regulations. In addition, public health and safety is a priority at solid waste facilities and recycling centers. Several industry sources have published best management practices for the storage of baled recyclable materials. We've provided a synopsis of these practices below:

Have a Storage Management Operations Plan describing procedures for receiving, storing, and shipping baled recyclables.

- Unload baled recyclables by forklift and stack in a specific storage area in a configuration that provides for long-term stability. If applicable, stacked bales may be overlapped or staggered to improve the stability of the stacks. Height of the bales should be no greater than four bales high.
- The bale storage area should allow forklift operators to safely move materials and allow for the safe loading of trailers that are picking up bales of materials.

To prevent contact with storm water, and to control vectors and nuisance, the following may be employed:

- Limit bale contact with the ground (e.g., on pallets and/or tarps)
- Maintain facility cleaning, housekeeping and litter control
- Remove putrescible material, if observed
- Maintain heavy equipment to ensure no oil or fuel leakage occurs; clean up spills or leaks immediately
- Establish a first in/first out material handling process
- Where necessary, place berms or other structures to divert storm water from coming into contact with bales

Fire Hazard Mitigations:

- Consult with your local fire district to employ fire hazard mitigations
 - Keep adequate heavy equipment available on-site: (e.g., front loaders, bulldozers, water trucks, bobcats), fire hoses, dedicated fire pump and water tanks, and fire extinguishers.
 - Identify a maximum size of the storage area including length/width/height.
 - Maintain appropriate spacing between piles and the perimeter, maintain fire lanes
 - Inspect piles daily for potential fire hazards
 - Monitor pile temperatures at least once a week
- Coordinate with the Local Enforcement Agency and any local or state authorities responsible for the regulatory oversight of the facility.

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Next Steps

CalRecycle will host a workshop in Sacramento in early June to encourage dialogue and share information about the impacts of China's import policies. Workshop details will be posted on our [National Sword website](#). We will use this convening as an opportunity to discuss changing market dynamics, impacts on facilities, domestic capacity for processing and manufacturing using recycled content, and to identify other short and long-term solutions to the current recycling challenges. This is not the first time the international recycling commodities market has faced a major disruption and it won't be the last. California must capitalize on these disruptions and turn them into an opportunity to strengthen our environmental resilience and our economy. This will require us to reassess product design, materials collection, and processing systems. I look forward to working with you to build a more sustainable recycling infrastructure in California.



Scott Smithline
Director