



## WASHINGTON REFUSE & RECYCLING ASSOCIATION

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### **Washington's Solid Waste and Recycling Industry Details Response to China's New Restrictions for Recyclable Materials Imports**

*New restrictions temporarily eliminate a key market for many recyclable materials, forcing diversion to domestic landfills*

WASHINGTON – Today the Washington Refuse and Recycling Association (WRRRA) detailed the state industry's response to new and significant restrictions set by China on the import of recyclable materials to their country. The restrictions announced by the Chinese government in mid-July dramatically impact the amount and type of recyclable materials that China will import going forward. As a direct result of the significant and swift reduction in the size of the marketplace for recycled goods, Washington State's waste and recycling industry will be forced to temporarily divert recyclable materials to our state's landfills while new markets are developed. While the short-term impacts to our recycling system are significant, the adjustment is also an opportunity to review and improve our state's curbside recycling programs.

"Our region's commitment to recycling is a bedrock value that makes the Pacific Northwest special – we're proud of that," said **Brad Lovaas, Executive Director of the WRRRA**. "Our member companies – from major publicly-traded corporations to family-owned independent businesses – are proud of how our industry has partnered with the public to make our state's ambitious recycling goals a reality."

**Lovaas continued:** "We share the public's disappointment that materials that normally would be recycled are instead going to be diverted to a landfill. I know I speak for our entire membership when I say that we are dedicated to identifying short, mid- and long-term solutions for supporting a system that allows us to

honor our shared commitment to holding on to one of the country's leading recycling rate.”

China notified the World Trade Organization in July that it plans to ban the import of at least 24 varieties of solid waste and recyclables, including types of plastic, unsorted paper, and metals commonly sold by U.S. recyclers. China will also apply stringent new quality standards to the remaining materials not covered by the ban. The ban, set to go into effect by the end of 2017, is part of a broader Chinese customs program called “Operation Green Fence,” which began in 2013, aims to reduce waste importation and contamination of recyclable materials.

The latest phase of this operation is called “National Sword,” which increases enforcement and bans the import of many materials. Wastes and recyclable materials are the sixth largest U.S. export to China. The combination of the ban on the import of many materials and dramatically increased standards to guard against contamination of other materials are together causing the current dramatic reduction in the recyclables marketplace.

“For purposes of public health and safety, sanitation, and fire safety, we encourage people to stick to their normal routine for sorting garbage, recycling, and food waste,” **said Lovaas**. “If you want to help, please pay attention to the sticker on your co-mingled recycle bin or other information you have from your provider and local government solid waste divisions as to what can be recycled. If you are unsure – throw it in the garbage. When in doubt, throw it out.”

The recycling system is 100% dependent on a marketplace for recyclable materials. Whether it is plastic, paper, or aluminum, the waste and recycling industry is only able to recycle waste if a marketplace exists for the waste products. The current situation is unique because China is a primary source of manufactured products and packaging and their policy change transpired abruptly, something that is challenging for infrastructure services like solid waste and recycling collections and processing because it is so complex.

Washington, Oregon, and California are particularly impacted by China's policy change because the West Coast is active in trade with China and other countries where imports/exports are made easier because of where they are located. Washington's recycling rate hovers around 50 percent, well above the national

average, in part because of its proximity to China. China is the largest importer of recyclable materials, consuming approximately 2/3 of all recyclable materials that are collected worldwide and is one of the biggest manufacturers in the world – named the #1 Most Competitive Manufacturing Nation in 2016 by Deloitte, a global financial and consulting firm.

This is a national and international issue, but the negative effects are very local. At this point, there is no excess capacity in the recycling facilities or markets in our region that can absorb the materials that China will no longer accept. Hence, this means there is not enough storage or processing capacity for the recyclable materials that are generated by the recycling programs in our state. As a result, this could create a potential crisis in which no markets would exist that can take the recyclable material. In the short term, this is forcing our waste and recycling industry to dispose of typically-recyclable materials in our system's landfills while it continues to seek long-term market and processing solutions.

#### About WRRRA

The WRRRA is a statewide trade association representing Washington's diverse and multifaceted solid waste handling industry. WRRRA is the oldest solid waste trade association in the western United States, having been formed in 1947. We represent your local curbside solid waste and recycling services companies. Member companies provide services in virtually every community throughout the state, providing those services under state law, administered by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission or by city contract. WRRRA Member companies also operate many of the material recovery facilities where the collected recyclables are sorted and processed for shipping.

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