

# Malaysia to ship back hundreds of tonnes of plastic waste

May 28 2019, by M Jegathesan

---



Malaysia will ship back tonnes of plastic waste after declaring it will no longer be the world's dumping ground

Hundreds of tonnes of imported plastic waste will be shipped back to where it came from, Malaysia said Tuesday, insisting the country did not

want to be a global dumping ground.

Around 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year, according to the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), with much of it ending up in landfill or polluting the seas, in what is becoming a growing international crisis.

China had previously taken a large amount of waste for recycling, but abruptly stopped last year, saying it wanted to improve its own environment.

Now Southeast Asian countries that stepped in to plug this gap say they have had enough.

"We urge developed countries to stop shipping garbage to our country," said Yeo Bee Yin, Malaysia's minister of energy, technology, science, environment and climate change, adding it was "unfair and uncivilised".

"We will return it back to the country of origin without any mercy," she said, after an inspection of several waste-filled containers at Port Klang, the country's busiest port.

Plastic imports to Malaysia have tripled since 2016, to 870,000 tonnes last year, official data showed.

The influx has sparked a rapid increase in the number of recycling plants, many of them operating without a licence and with little regard for environmental standards.

Lee Chee Kwang, an activist with Environment Protection Agency Kuala Langat, said Malaysia has "failed miserably" to manage the rubbish coming into the country.





Hundreds of millions of tonnes of plastic are produced every year, with much of it ending up in landfill or polluting the seas and beaches

"The government must ban entry of plastic waste and declare it as public enemy number one," he said.

## **'Traitors'**

While Malaysia allows the import of homogenous and clean waste plastics for the recycling industry, there are growing public calls for the government to ban the import of used plastics altogether.

The country's move to ship the refuse back was "only a symbolic public

stunt which does not solve the problem," Lee said. "The solution is a total ban of imports of all kinds of plastic."

Minister Yeo vowed a crackdown on illegal imports and recycling facilities. The Malaysians involved in importing the waste are "traitors", she said.

"Malaysia will not be a dumping ground to the world," Yeo added. "We cannot be bullied by the developed countries."

The ministry said 450 tonnes of contaminated plastic waste in 10 containers—from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the United States—will be shipped back.

Port officials said their contents were misdeclared, but did not give a date for the shipment.

"These containers are filled with contaminated, non-homogenous, low-quality, non-recyclable plastic waste, and are routed to processing facilities which do not have the technology to recycle in an environmentally sound manner," the ministry said.



Around 300 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year, with only a small percentage recycled

Malaysia last month sent back five containers filled with plastic waste to Spain.

Inspections are being carried out on more than 50 other containers brought in illegally.

Yeo said it will take until the end of the year to fully deal with the problem.

She said 150 illegal waste recycling plants had been shut down.



But the problem is widespread and citizens are taking action over the plastic influx.

Some 12,000 people in central Selangor state are protesting a recycling factory allowed to operate near their homes, community leader Joshua Tee told AFP.

"Processing such materials produces toxic fumes. Villagers say they are suffering from asthma and itchiness," he said.

As little as nine percent of plastic produced between 1950 and 2015 has been recycled.

Pictures of coral reefs smothered in plastic bags and river systems choked with PET bottles have sparked a growing worldwide awareness of the need to deal with the problem.

© 2019 AFP

Citation: Malaysia to ship back hundreds of tonnes of plastic waste (2019, May 28) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-05-malaysia-ship-hundreds-tonnes-plastic.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.