

The economic costs and environmental justice concerns of 'not in my backyard' trash import bans

March 9 2023



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Each year, Americans generate more than 200 million tons of solid waste. Much of this waste is not ultimately deposited in the same place it



was first thrown away, but is instead hauled across state or county lines to large facilities that offer low disposal prices or other perks. Trash haulers balance the costs of transporting trash and these incentives when choosing where to deposit waste.

Groups and individuals in many jurisdictions have voiced support for "not in my backyard," or "NIMBY," laws that limit waste transporting to their local dumping sites. Such local laws have been overturned by the Supreme Court, and while NIMBY waste transport laws have been introduced in every session of the United States Congress, they have never been enacted. The NIMBY phenomenon also raises concerns that exposure to waste facilities and shipments could be unevenly distributed between demographics.

In the paper "The Costs and Environmental Justice Concerns of NIMBY in Solid Waste Disposal," published in the *Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists*, Phuong Ho examines the economic and environmental justice impacts of such NIMBY laws in California. Bans on transboundary waste transport would not only be costly, but would also result in the direction of waste away from facilities near white residents and towards those near Hispanic residents, the study finds.

Ho examined data on <u>trash</u> disposal in California, which reports regular figures on waste flow origins and disposal and exports very little of its solid waste to other states. For example, the average county in California sends 21,000 tons of waste each quarter between 1995 and 2015, shipping it an average 24 miles at an average price of \$36 per ton.

Combining these data with information on fees charged by disposal stations to unload waste as well as the transport distance between population centers and disposal facilities, Ho used a random utility model to examine the tradeoffs made by haulers and how the NIMBY



laws would drive them to make alternative choices for where they deposit their trash.

Ho applied the model to two scenarios: one in which only one county imposes a NIMBY waste transport policy and one in which all counties in California do so. If NIMBY trash import bans were passed in every county in the state, facilities would raise disposal prices by \$5.84/ton on average to respond to the loss of intercounty trash business. The ban would cost haulers in a county an additional \$4.63/ton.

If a NIMBY ban was passed in just one county, exported waste from that county would rise 90% and other nearby areas would become dumping hotspots. Trash disposal would be more costly for haulers in the county, with local facilities raising prices by \$3.80/ton, and haulers would be forced to reroute transport to more expensive facilities within the county, or to travel farther, to less-expensive facilities in outside counties.

In all, the ban would cost an extra \$2.09/ton for the county, and "besides the increase in the cost of discarding waste, the NIMBY law could increase total intercounty waste in California," by as many as 12,000 tons, Ho finds.

In addition to evaluating the costs of NIMBY trash import bans, Ho used <u>census data</u> from 2010 to study how waste shipments are distributed by race and how such import restrictions could affect that distribution. Under current conditions, facilities in <u>minority communities</u> are more likely to receive trash, with disposal sites in Hispanic communities especially affected as they are close to population centers of waste origin.

If NIMBY import bans are implemented throughout California, "waste that is sent to facilities near white residents would be rerouted to



facilities near Hispanic residents," Ho writes. "These results suggest NIMBY laws could have unintended consequences on the distribution of waste flows by race."

More information: Phuong Ho, The Costs and Environmental Justice Concerns of NIMBY in Solid Waste Disposal, *Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists* (2022). DOI: 10.1086/722613

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: The economic costs and environmental justice concerns of 'not in my backyard' trash import bans (2023, March 9) retrieved 27 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2023-03-economic-environmental-justice-backyard-trash.html

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