Burn or spurn? What to do with Western waste

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Western countries recycle lots of plastic bottles but other forms of plastic are harder to deal with

Western countries must increasingly deal with hard to dispose of plastics because China and many southeastern Asian countries no longer want

them.

Incinerators or landfills are two quick fixes since Beijing shut the door in January 2018 to some foreign refuse, but specialists say longer term solutions should involve better recycling or better yet, less junk to start with.

So far, the global recycling network has not managed to adapt as countries in Asia have given up trying to replace China.

"The problem is that the quantities involved are huge," Arnaud Brunet, head of the Brussels-based Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) told AFP, and potential substitutes for China were overwhelmed.

They also became dumping grounds for illegal imports, in particular of material that is either hard to recycle or not recyclable at all, Brunet said.

"Some countries will unfortunately become the world's new rubbish heaps, the poorest nations will take in refuse in exchange for payment, but will suffer environmental and social costs," noted Vincent Aurez, a circular economy specialist at the EY consulting group.

European countries recycle some plastics such as transparent bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate or PET, but ship abroad plastics that are either "of poor quality and value" or not recyclable, a recent report by the non-governmental group Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) noted.

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