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Environmental groups commend Thai government for banning plastic waste imports, call for strong implementation

On December 16th, 2025, the Ministry of Commerce of Thailand released a [notification](#) designating plastic scraps under the custom code 39.15 as goods prohibited from being imported into the kingdom. The notification comes into effect from January 1st, 2025 onwards.

We, the undersigned civil society working to end plastic pollution in Thailand, commend the Thai government for its strong stance on this important matter. The prohibition of plastic waste imports helps reduce the supply of plastics and thus plastic pollution in Thailand. It cuts the supply chain that brings toxic plastic waste to illegal or poorly managed waste management and recycling factories in the country. It also protects the domestic circular economy, safeguarding the income and livelihoods of waste collectors.

Plastic waste imports became a national crisis after 2017, when China banned the import of plastic waste. This led to the diversion of exportation of plastic and other types of waste from developed countries such as the United States and countries of the European Union to the Southeast Asian region, including Thailand. The plastic waste that flowed into our region provided



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an unending supply for waste sorting and recycling factories owned by or affiliated with foreigners, especially from China. Many of these factories operated illegally and/or without consideration for the impact on the environment and the health of the local population. In the view of the undersigned civil society organisations, this influx of waste from the global north to global south countries such as Thailand - in effect the export of pollution and environmental burden - constitutes “waste colonialism”.

From 2018 onwards, Thai civil society began to push back against this waste colonialism, calling for an end to the import of plastic and electronic waste. This led to the seizure of large amounts of illicit plastic and electronic waste imports between 2018 - 2019, and the subsequent establishment of a subcommittee on plastic and electronic waste. In 2021, 72 civil society organisations released a statement calling for a ban of plastic waste imports. Eventually, in 2023, the cabinet decided that Thailand will ban plastic waste after December 31st, 2024. This cabinet decision has now been transmuted into law.

“The prohibition of plastic waste import should have been promulgated in 2021, but the subcommittee allowed a three-year grace period for importers and recyclers. Now, that period has come to an end. Even though delayed, the enactment of this law is a very positive development. Now,



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Thailand is a leader in ASEAN regarding laws against import of plastic waste. Nevertheless, civil society will need to keep monitoring the enforcement of this law. After all, Thailand has enacted a ban on electronic waste imports before, yet there are still illegal imports of electronic waste.” Penchom Saetang, director of Ecological Alert and Recovery - Thailand (EARTH) said.

“While this is a great step forward for Thailand, there is more work to be done. After the law comes into effect, the Thai government must work to ensure its enforcement and implementation. This means industrial, environmental, and customs agencies must cooperate to prevent any illicit imports of plastic waste under the custom code 39.15. They must establish a cooperative multi-stakeholder framework and system to ensure monitoring, capture, and repatriation of illegally imported waste. Additionally, the current law does not address the transit of plastic waste, meaning Thailand could be used as a transit state to send waste to our ASEAN neighbors. The Thai government must guard against this.” Punyathorn Jeungsmarn, plastics campaign researcher at the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) added.

“The current law only bans plastic waste declared under the custom code 39.15. However, there have been cases of plastic waste declared under other custom codes, such as one for



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mixed paper scraps. The Thai government should assess the current custom codes to identify those with high risk of plastic contamination or false declaration, in order to consider expanding the scope of the ban going forward. These works should involve participation from civil society, and be communicated to the public in a transparent manner.” Pichmol Rugrod, Plastics-Free Future Project Leader at Greenpeace Thailand concluded.

This import ban has propelled Thailand into a leading position in the Southeast Asian region, with regards to combating waste colonialism. The Thai government should take this opportunity to lead the region in pushing for strong regional and global measures to control and prevent transboundary movement and trade of plastic waste. Lessons should be shared with other countries in the ASEAN region. Work should be initiated not only to protect Southeast Asia from plastic waste export but also to solve the problem of intra-regional trade.

Finally, Thailand should play a role in pushing for control of plastic waste export from the source: exporting countries. Ensuring that measures are taken to ban plastic waste exports can significantly reduce the burden of destination and transit countries to monitor and track imports. Such measures have been discussed during the intergovernmental negotiating committee meetings to establish an international legally binding



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instrument to address plastic pollution, also known as the “global plastics treaty”.

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Notes for editors

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Ecological Alert and Recovery - Thailand (EARTH) is a non-profit organisation focusing on research and monitoring of industrial pollution and chemical safety issues, aiming to promote environmental justice, community rights, access to information, participation rights, transparency, accountability, and corporate responsibility under the principle of "Polluter Pays."

The **Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)** works internationally to inform policy and drive systemic, durable reforms to protect our environment and defend human rights. We investigate and expose abuses and support environmental defenders, Indigenous peoples, communities, and independent journalists on the frontlines of



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environmental injustice. Our campaigns aim to secure peaceful, equitable, and sustainable futures.

Our investigators, researchers, filmmakers, and campaigners work with grassroots partners and environmental defenders across the globe. Our work to secure environmental justice aims to protect our global climate, ocean, forests, wetlands, wildlife and defend the fundamental human right to a secure natural environment, recognising that all other rights are contingent on this.

Greenpeace Thailand is an independent environmental campaigning organisation that uses peaceful protest and creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems and promote solutions that are essential to a green, just, and peaceful future.

TRASH HERO is an energetic, volunteer-led movement that drives change within communities around the world, motivating and supporting them to clean and prevent plastic waste.