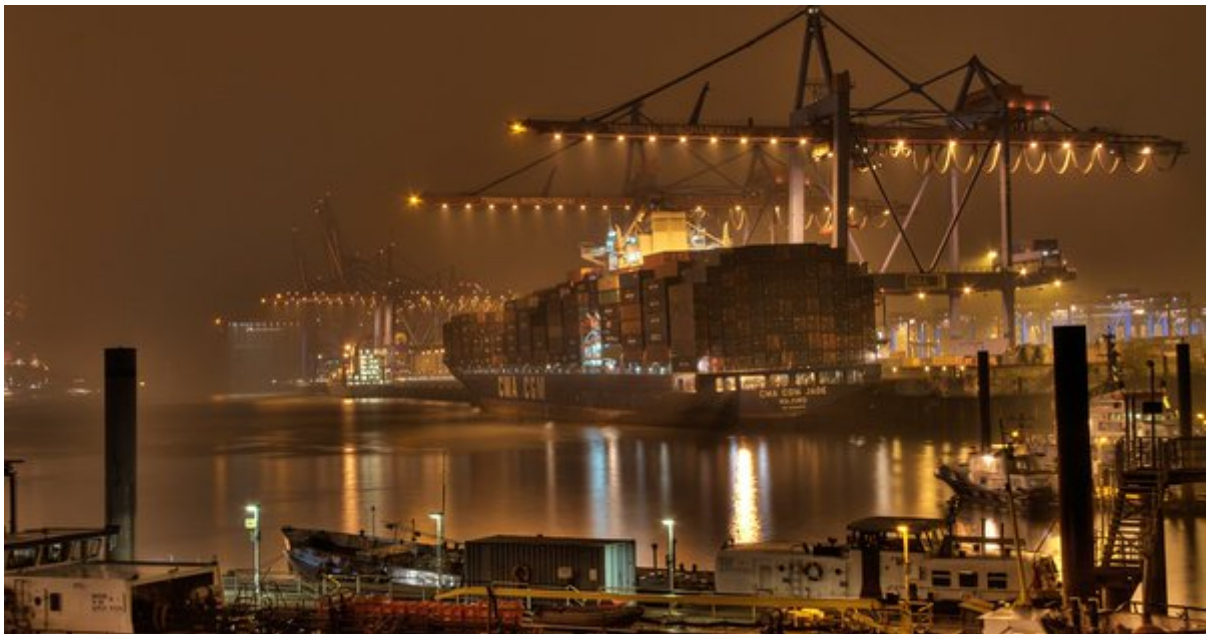


# China urged to avoid 'shock to the recycling system'

8 December, 2017 By [Robin Latchem](#)



China has been urged to step back from imposing draconian contaminations limits on imported secondary materials or risk a “shock to the system” that will put “severe pressure” on international traders.

The call comes from the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) in response to China’s recent submission to the World Trade Organization of a tougher regime under the country’s ‘GB Standards’.

[In a formal letter to official bodies](#) (see below), BIR warns: “It is unlikely that the combined manual sorting and mechanical processing capacity of recycling companies worldwide can process the current volumes of waste and scrap that China imports to meet these proposed high-quality thresholds.”

The crux is the level of contamination – “carried wastes” – typically found with materials after manual or mechanical recycling. Existing EU and US standards typically range from 2-5% but China says it wants most grades to be set at 0.5%, although there are exemptions (for example, 1% for non-ferrous metal scrap and 0.3% for end-of-life vehicles).

China says this is on environmental grounds but some have suggested the move is protectionist.

The bureau, which represents companies and associations in more than more than 70 countries, has called on China to reconsider revising the GB standards, saying widely used commercial specifications between secondary raw material suppliers and consumers already have “practical and pragmatic limits” on carried wastes.

It says the proposed new thresholds are significantly tougher than the 2005 GB Standards: “Strict enforcement of these new 2017 and extremely tight limits ... will be therefore a shock to the system,” it notes.

BIR is also concerned that these new limits will be used for absolute pass/fail decisions, rather than being used in the negotiation of contracts.

“For nearly a century and to date the quality thresholds used under normal commercial transactions for waste and scrap for recycling have not been used as pass/fail criteria for exports or imports. Normal commercial practice is, in case of consignments that deviate from the specifications agreed in the contract, to make a price adjustment,” it says.

BIR is concerned that if the standards are imposed as a means to reject import loads, it will result in a drastic reduction in suppliers, increasing prices for Chinese importers.

It also fears that the changes, as well as bans on post-consumer plastics and the National Sword crackdown during year, is asking too much of its members: “Altogether these changes put too severe pressure on companies”.

- [BIR's letter is addressed](#) to the World Trade Organisation; the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the People's Republic of China; the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China; and the Standardization Administration of the People's Republic of China