



China's minister for environment signals tough stance on imports

China's Ministry of Environmental Protection has this week signalled that it will take a tough line on the new regulations governing the import of "solid waste" into the country under its revised regulations.

Environment minister Li Ganje, speaking at a video conference on Wednesday (22 November), stressed the importance of keeping to the "environmental principles" put forward by China's President, Xi Jinping. Vice Minister Zhao Yingmin presided over the video conference and the director generals of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provincial environmental protection departments shared their experiences.

Mr Li called on his audience of officials and regulators to "resolutely implement the guiding principles of the major instructions of General Secretary Xi Jinping; and unwaveringly ban foreign wastes as a milestone measure taken to build ecological civilization."

(China uses the term "solid waste" with reference to materials imported for recycling – the UK has been sending, for example, 1 million tonnes of mixed paper to China each year for recycling.)

In a non-compromising address, there seemed to be only one potential note of encouragement for exporters of solid waste from the UK when the minister said that the government would move forward with the plans "steadily" [translated from Chinese].

The minister explained [translated from the Chinese version] that "The ban of foreign wastes is an important announcement of the Party to uplift ecological civilization in all aspects, an inherent requirement for meeting the ever-growing demand of the people for a beautiful ecological environment, and a focal point to foster green growth models and lifestyles."

Actions

The minister listed actions taken with local government and departments over waste imports.

He said that these have been monitored closely and 1,792 importers of waste have been consulted. Waste sites have been checked "so that the foreign wastes have nowhere to hide".

Licenses permitting the import of solid waste have become more strict, said Mr Li. And, he noted that an uncompliant company cannot apply for the import of wastes within the year since its non-compliance breach.

The latter point is likely to be of concern to exporters who are already very wary of sending material to China which might potentially and unwittingly be in breach of the regulations.

The minister also confirmed that "municipal waste plastics, unsorted waste paper, waste textile materials, and vanadium slags, are listed as wastes prohibited from import".

Thoughts and awareness

Environmental regulators were then called on by Mr Li to "implement the implementation plan to the letter. First, we should align our thoughts and awareness with the Central authorities. We will make sure the reform measures are effectively implemented, significantly cut down the import volume, and strive to overachieve the objectives set forth in the plan."

He pledged to maintain a tough stance in enforcement and punish non-compliance companies "severely".

Of significance also in Mr Li's speech was reference to the permitting or licensing regime for the importing of solid waste. The issuing of licenses can disrupt the export market for waste paper and plastics particularly when there is a hiatus in permitting or decisions to not issue permits to some mills.

Mr Li said: "We will tighten the regulation over imported waste processors. In 2018, the waste import permits will be issued more discreetly and in a smaller amount. We will conduct rigid on-site inspection over applicant companies and forbid falsification. We will continue to strengthen environmental protection and make sure the processing of imported wastes do not pollute the environment or harm the human health." [translated from Chinese]

Industry view



China's Minister for Environmental Protection, Li Ganje, on an inspection visit to Shaanxi earlier this month



Zhao Yingmin, Vice Minister for Environmental Protection (right) addressing regulators and local government officials at this week's solid waste conference in China

MATERIAL percentage	
Smelt slag	0.5
Wood	0.5
Paper	0.5
Ferrous	0.5
Non-ferrous	1
Waste electric r	0.5
Wires & cables	0.5
Metal scrap	0.5

Giving a European perspective this week on the situation with regard to the exports of solid waste/material for recycling to China, the Brussels-based Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) said that it felt that China hadn't been listening to representations by exporters of materials for recycling.

BIR Director General Arnaud Brunet told [letsrecycle.com](https://www.letsrecycle.com) that "the recent changes that China has introduced to its notified standards compared to the original version, even if they are not up to our expectations, nevertheless show that the Government of China listens to the arguments of the industry, whether Chinese or global, to some extent."

Mr Brunet continued: "We hope that China, in a pragmatic approach, will also listen to the calls of the global stakeholders to adopt a progressive implementation of its new scrap import policies and standards. In any case BIR will strongly voice this at the World Trade Organization (WTO) together with the need to have reasonable impurity thresholds, consistent with the actual capacity of the industry to deliver quality secondary raw materials"

Vessels	0.05
Plastic	0.5
Autos	0.3

The percentage limits for contaminants/contraries which are likely to be allowed next year by China

