

Scrap Collector: Southeast Asian activists call for ASEAN ban on foreign waste imports

By
[Rina Li @rinasunshine_li](#)
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Welcome to Scrap Collector, Waste Dive's Friday round-up of insights and stories you may have missed during the week.

Southeast Asian environmental groups aren't happy with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This year's summit in Bangkok will see leaders from the 10 member countries — including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines — gather to discuss global sustainability issues.

Notably absent from the docket, however, is any mention of the international scrap trade.

"We are quite surprised and a little bit disappointed because ... the issue of waste trade that the region [is] facing has not been [put] on the table," Greenpeace Thailand country director Tara Buakamsri said at a press conference on Tuesday, [according to Voice of America](#).

ASEAN's expected adoption of the [Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris](#) — its first ocean pollution agreement — is "not enough," according to Buakamsri. In the wake of China's scrap ban, Southeast Asian countries have attempted to stymie a tide of contaminated imports, with [Malaysia](#), [Indonesia](#) and [the Philippines](#) announcing plans to ship back thousands of tons of material.

In light of [increasingly dire circumstances](#), activists are calling for ASEAN to ban all plastic and e-waste imports — including those labeled as recyclables — and to sign the recently ratified [Basel Convention plastics amendment](#).

Some industry stakeholders, however, caution against sweeping bans.

"A blanket ban is not a perfect solution, ignoring the nuanced contexts and not solving the fundamental problem," Chris Cui, [director of Closed Loop Partners' China Program](#), told Waste Dive via email. "We would encourage policy makers to work with private industry, local NGOs and communities to come up with a more holistic approach that integrates circular economy principles from the start, ensuring that either imported or domestic waste is safely transformed into valuable commodities."

Arnaud Brunet, director general of the Bureau of International Recycling, emphasized to Waste Dive the distinction between scrap and illegal waste.

"We can only regret and condemn the illegal trade of waste and their consequences on the environment, but those are criminal activities unrelated to the legal activities of the recycling companies involved in international trade of scrap," he commented via email. "We do not believe that a ban on trade of secondary raw materials is a long term option, when secondary raw materials are needed for production around the globe and as a substitute to primary resources. The solution is for the industry to process more and produce better quality scrap, and for the manufacturers to design for recycling and incorporate more recycled content."