Recycling Europe
Plastics

STATEMENT

EU bans plastic waste exports with demand for recycled plastics remaining too little, too late

Brussels, 21 November 2026 – As the EU ban on plastic waste exports to non-OECD countries **takes effect today**, **Europe's recyclers face a growing problem, with more plastic waste set to remain within the bloc, but no guarantees that manufacturers will buy the recycled materials produced from it**. Recycling Europe warns that, without urgent measures to secure demand for European recycled plastics, more waste could end up being incinerated or landfilled instead of recycled.

The consequences will reach far beyond recycling plants: local authorities, waste holders and extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes could face sharply rising waste management costs, while Europe risks losing the very recycling capacity it has spent years trying to build.

Keeping plastic waste in Europe does not mean it will be recycled in Europe. Someone still has to buy the recycled material. Yet, Europe's recyclers are already struggling to compete with virgin plastics, whose prices fluctuate with oil markets, and most often undercut recycled alternatives, as well as cheaper imports that do not always face equivalent production standards or scrutiny. **The export ban will only add to these pressures.** Without a corresponding increase in demand for recycled plastics, recyclers cannot simply absorb these additional volumes, putting the economic viability of collection, sorting and recycling operations at risk. **Europe risks replacing an export problem with a waste management crisis.**

The industry needs urgent action. While the EU has begun introducing **mandatory recycled-content requirements**, **these will only start applying as of 2030 at the earliest, and Europe's recyclers cannot afford to wait that long.** Recycling Europe calls for mandatory recycled-content requirements across more sectors, beyond packaging and automotive, a clear preference for European recyclates, and robust equivalence requirements for imports to ensure fair competition. In this regard, the Commission must **adopt the PPWR implementing and delegated acts without delay**, maintain the fuel-use-excluded mass-balance methodology, and remove barriers to recycling by introducing harmonised End-of-Waste criteria and EPR eco-modulated fees that reward recycled products and the use of European recycled plastics. Above all, it must urgently fix the digital waste shipment system (DIWASS).

Europe cannot close international markets today and ask its recyclers to wait until 2030 or beyond for meaningful demand. The plastics recycling industry has invested in the facilities, technology and expertise needed to turn plastic waste into valuable resources. But without customers, it cannot keep investing or even keep operating. **The plastic waste will stay in Europe. Whether it gets recycled is now a question of political will and industrial commitment.**

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