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The China Ban's Wake-Up Call: Recycling is Not Enough

Leaders from Around the World Demand Less Plastic

January 22, 2018-Recycling professionals, environmentalists, and policy influencers are calling for a significant reduction in the production of plastics, citing China's recent ban on plastic waste imports from other countries as a "wake-up call" that we can't recycle our way out of plastic pollution.

GAIA, with the help of core partners around the globe, did extensive research on the state of plastic recycling worldwide, and the immediate and potential long-term effects of China's ban. Our research indicates that **the only real way to solve the world's plastic pollution crisis is to simply make less plastic**. Our key findings include:

- Plastics producers are planning on flooding the markets with a massive scale-up over the coming decades, fueled by cheap fossil fuel extraction like shale gas.
- Companies are not only designing plastic to be difficult or impossible to recycle, but the overwhelming flood of new plastic into the market thwarts any chance of recycling keeping up.
- Wealthier societies like the US and Europe tend to recycle high-quality plastic domestically and export low-worth plastics to Asia, burdening these countries with the occupational and environmental health hazards that arise from processing these materials. Many times exporting countries have little idea of where their waste actually goes.
- China's ban can instigate increased investment in domestic recycling capacity, but can also lead to increased plastic incineration and exportation to other Asian countries besides China, exposing their inhabitants to pollution.

*GAIA's report on the state of plastics recycling, "Recycling is Not Enough," was created in collaboration with Zero Waste Europe, with help from Break Free From Plastic, Consumers Association of Penang (Malaysia), Friends of the Earth Europe, Ecology Center (U.S.), Story of Stuff (U.S.), BaliFokus (Indonesia), and the China Zero Waste Alliance. **Please see attached list of contributors for more information and quotes.***

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