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Forces converge to disrupt the waste industry

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On Dec. 5, 2019, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, or the Basel Convention, celebrated the Basel Ban Amendment officially becoming international law.^[1] The Ban Amendment prohibits the export of hazardous wastes from member states of the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Liechtenstein to nonmember countries.

The amendment was adopted in 1995 but took many years to reach the threshold required to become law; that threshold was reached after Croatia ratified the amendment on Sept. 6, 2019. The final ratification of the Ban Amendment comes after the Basel Convention passed several other amendments at the 2019 Conference of the Parties.^[2]

Under the amendments, plastic waste is now separated into three legal categories:

1. Hazardous waste: Plastics listed under the Basel Convention's Annex VIII.
2. Other waste: Plastics listed under Annex II.
3. Nonhazardous waste: Plastics listed under Annex IX.

The Ban Amendment, together with amendments that recategorize waste, could significantly alter the way waste, particularly plastic waste, is traded and managed around the world. The multibillion-dollar (USD) trade in waste was further disrupted by China's decision to tighten import controls, such that it constituted a ban on most waste traditionally sent to China and other Asian nations by developed nations, such as the United States, Canada and Japan.^[3]

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