

For immediate release:
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A Global Waste Shell Game: "Returned" Illegal Waste Shipments from U.S., Diverted from Indonesia to other Asian Countries

28 October 2019 – Jakarta, Indonesia. In what environmental watchdogs are calling a global pollution shell game, Indonesian officials have been caught approving re-exports of illegal U.S. waste shipments to other Asian countries instead of returning them to the U.S. as promised. Instead of being returned to their senders, the waste containers have been diverted to India, Thailand, South Korea, and Vietnam.

"After promising that the illegal plastic waste imports would be returned to their countries of origin, our officials have instead, engaged in a global waste shell game, victimizing more countries with the unwanted, illegal and contaminated shipments," said Yuyun Ismawati of the Indonesian NGO, Nexus3. *"Meanwhile the U.S. government and the original perpetrators of the illegal shipments are let off the hook. The public has been lied to, the environment is further harmed, and the criminals go free. It's outrageous."*

The original U.S. waste shipments were imported by the Indonesian paper recycling companies PT Mega Surya Eratama and PT Surabaya Mekabox located in East Java. Upon arrival they were deemed illegal by Indonesian authorities when they were found to contain large amounts of plastic and hazardous wastes mixed into what was supposed to be paper scrap.

In the [Indonesian government press release](#) issued on September 18, 2019, the government noted the [hundreds of consignments of illegal waste imports](#) and stated that the containers "will be reexported to their country of origin."

The source and identification numbers of 70 of the seized containers were obtained by Nexus3 from a trusted source. 58 of these containers came from the U.S. with 25 of the containers shipped by the Cosco Shipping Line, 13 by the Maersk Shipping Line, and 20 more by the Hyundai Line.

The waste trade watchdog group Basel Action Network (BAN) then tracked the return pathways of the illicit containers. BAN discovered that of the 58 containers that were meant to be returned to the U.S., 38 containers were diverted to India, three to South Korea, and one container each went to Thailand, Vietnam, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Canada. Only 12 of the 58 were actually returned to the U.S. as promised by the government.

"It is an international norm that illegal waste exports are the responsibility of the state of export, in this case the United States, and the exporting state has the duty to reimport the wastes," said Jim Puckett, Executive Director of Basel Action Network (BAN). *"In this way the exporters can be prosecuted for any illegality and the problem can actually be solved rather than simply passed on to other unsuspecting victim countries and communities."*

"In India, we thought we had banned the import of plastic wastes. Now we see more coming in through a back door," said Dharmesh Shah of GAIA in India. *"These shipments from Indonesia must be the subject of an international inquiry."*

It remains unknown whether the U.S. government was informed of the illegality of the exports to

Indonesia, or whether the governments where the wastes actually ended up were notified and able to consent to their import. It is further unknown whether the receiving facilities were even capable of environmentally sound management of the wastes. If the experience in Indonesia is representative, much of the plastic waste which comes with the paper waste ends up being burned in waysides, creating highly toxic smoke and fumes.

"Unwanted plastic scrap imported by paper companies in East Java have routinely contributed to the environmental pollution in poor communities," said Prigi Arisandi from Ecoton, Indonesia. "The same things will likely be repeated in other developing countries where the containers end up."

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About Nexus3 Foundation

Nexus for Health, Environment and Development Foundation (formerly known as BaliFokus Foundation) is working to safeguard the public, especially the vulnerable population, from health and the environmental impact of development, towards a just, toxic-free, and sustainable future.

www.balifokus.asia | www.nexus3foundation.org

About Basel Action Network (BAN)

Founded in 1997, Basel Action Network is a 501(c)3 charitable organization of the United States, based in Seattle, WA. BAN is the world's only organization focused on confronting the global environmental justice and economic inefficiency of toxic trade and its devastating impacts. Today, BAN serves as the information clearinghouse on the subject of waste trade for journalists, academics, and the general public. Through its investigations, BAN uncovered the tragedy of hazardous electronic waste dumping in developing countries. For more information, see www.BAN.org.

About the Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives (GAIA)

The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) is a global network of more than 800 grassroots groups, NGOs and individuals. We envision a just, zero waste world built on respect for ecological limits and community rights, where people are free from the burden of toxic pollution, and resources are sustainably conserved, not burned or dumped. We work to catalyze a global shift towards ecological and environmental justice by strengthening grassroots social movements that advance solutions to waste and pollution. www.no-burn.org

About ECOTON

ECOTON works towards the realisation of biodiversity sustainability and environmental functions for humans, through equitable and participatory river ecosystem and wetland management.

www.ecoton.org

Indonesian Government Official Press Release ([English](#) and [Bahasa Indonesian](#))

[Report with Data and Photos on US Shipments to Indonesia and their Returns](#)