

Plastic Pollution: new rules against dumping plastic

That plastics are harmful to the environment is a fact that no one can really argue with any more. Recycling of plastic has also been a much-talked-about topic. A conference held in Geneva in early May for the recycling and dumping of plastic globally has changed the rules to make them fairer to all countries.



Plastic pollution in the Philippines. Credit: reddit.com

What is the deal? Earlier, developed countries such as the US and others in Europe could ship lower-quality, hard-to-recycle plastic waste to private companies in less developed countries to dispose of it. Now, they will need to get the approval of the government in each country before they can take such action. The treaty is a big step in controlling how

much waste is sent to poorer countries.

Who signed the treaty? Governments of 180 countries signed up to an amendment to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) treaty, officially called The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. Interestingly, the US, which is the single largest exporter of plastic waste, has not signed up to the treaty. However, the new rules will still apply to them as they will not be able to ship contaminated plastic to countries who have signed the treaty, without receiving the permission of these governments.

What pushed countries to take this action? Earlier this year, China stopped accepting recycling material from the US. As a result, countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia became 'dumping grounds' for these plastics. The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), brought this to the world's attention. Beautiful villages and smaller towns were suddenly flooded with this waste.

Growing awareness, particularly among the younger generation, is another big reason for the change. Social media images of animals and birds with their stomachs full of plastic are horrible and cause international anger. This has led to a significant global movement against plastic.

Hopefully, the real effect of this treaty will be a reduction in the use of plastic as countries find it harder and harder to recycle.

If you would like to know more about such environmental movements, here are a few websites you can check out:

www.foei.org

Plasticoceans.org

climatekids.nasa.gov



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