

Basel Ban Amendment One Step Closer to Becoming Effective

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On October 21, 2011, 118 members of the Basel Convention reached an agreement to unblock the Ban Amendment, an amendment to the Basel Convention that will ban the export of hazardous waste from countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to non-OECD countries.

The Ban Amendment will prohibit wealthier countries from exporting their hazardous waste, including used electronics for recycling, to poorer countries, where these materials are often improperly treated or disposed of, causing myriad illnesses and deaths. The United Nations has estimated that 50 million tons of electronics worldwide are disposed of each year.

The Ban Amendment was originally adopted in 1995, but disagreement over its implementation since then has left it unenforceable.

Under the Country Led Initiative (CLI) to Improve the Effectiveness of the Basel Convention, the ban will become effective once 17 more countries ratify it. This is expected to happen in the next two to five years. Under the CLI decision, the Ban Amendment will be enforced for those countries adopting it, and it establishes a regime for other countries that continue to trade waste to minimize health and environmental effects, protect against unfair social and labor conditions, and provide additional economic opportunities.

The Ban Amendment has been strongly supported by the European Union, China, African countries and Colombia. Opponents included Australia, India, New Zealand, Japan and Canada.

The United States is still not a member of the Basel Convention and is not expected to join in the foreseeable future. Many experts believe that without the U.S.'s backing, neither the Convention nor the Ban Amendment will gain enough traction to have a real impact on the proper disposal of hazardous waste.