

Preface

Since the 1990s, Japan and the countries of the EU have been developing legislature on recycling and promoting the recovery of recyclable waste. However, collected resources are flowing into China and the rest of Asia in huge volumes due to an inability to fully utilize the stockpiles of recyclable waste internally. In some instances, secondhand products are being exported from developed countries to developing countries outside the legal framework for recycling.

In some importer countries, recyclable resources (recyclable waste and secondhand goods) are being put to effective use, but international flows of recyclable wastes are also generating environmental problems. Unrecoverable waste are being falsely labeled as recyclable waste and exported, and hazardous wastes are being exported as non-hazardous recyclable waste; both are being treated and/or disposed of improperly. Added to which, recyclable resources that have been moved across international frontiers are generating pollution during the recycle process.

The Basel Convention on the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes was adopted by the international community with a view to preventing these problems; the controls written into the Convention are based on a system of prior notification and consent. Some Asian countries have also introduced their own regulation on such imports; however, the regulations are not being duly enforced, and in some instances, overly strict legislation is hampering environmentally sound recycling efforts.

The ministers responsible for promoting the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) in the G8 countries and Asia, met in Tokyo at the end of April 2005 to discuss the 3R Initiative that was agreed upon at the June 2004 G8 Summit at Sea Island. Discussions at this ministerial meeting focus on “Reducing barriers to the international flow of goods and materials for recycling and remanufacturing, recycled and remanufactured products, and cleaner, more efficient technologies, consistent with existing environmental and trade obligations and frameworks”, and that the modalities of transboundary movements of recyclable resources were also debated. It became clear that shared understanding of prevailing conditions in international flows of recyclable resources is essential if these discussions are to be productive.

The primary objective of this report is to examine the current status of trade in recyclable resources within the Asia region. It is designed to objectify methods for controlling transboundary movements of recyclable resources and a framework for evaluating sound material-cycle economies within the context of global resource recycling. I hope that this report will serve as a useful resource in the consideration of the orientation of subsequent efforts to promote the 3Rs on a global level after the 3R ministerial meeting.

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