



Civil organizations present platform on the Colonialism of plastic waste and its use as fuel in Mexico

Mexico City, April 17, 2023. The Malditos Plásticos Collective (Acción Ecológica, Asociación Ecológica Santo Tomás, Fronteras Comunes), Geocomunes, Northern Geography, No Es Basura (NEB), the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), Break Free From Plastic (BFFP), Academia Mexicana de Derecho Ambiental and the International Pollutant Elimination Network (IPEN), present the virtual platform on "Plastic Waste Colonialism due to the pollution and problems caused by the export of plastic waste to Mexico and an interactive map on the use of plastic waste as fuel.

It contains downloadable geospatial data through the use of interactive visualization of the volume and value of plastic waste exports to Mexico for Tariff Item 3915(Waste, scrap and parings, of plastics and subheadings), mainly from the United States for the period 2015-2021 (and some data to 2022). The databases consulted were the Internet Tariff Information System (SIAMI), DATASUR, and USA Trade Online of the U.S. Census Bureau, which differ from each other.

The information is accompanied by a section with case studies describing territories with profound socio-environmental impacts due to the incineration of waste in cement kilns and plastic recycling processes. Cases of corporate greenwashing, legal cases of environmental regressions and a news compilation work on territories affected by the collapse of the garbage we already have throughout the country are shown, as if to import more.

Among the case studies, the Platform on plastic waste and refuse-derived fuels (RDF) presents the location of the cement establishments that use it with an approximation of the number of populations affected by this practice, as well as the legal loopholes in its regulation.

The worsening of the global plastic waste pollution crisis was evidenced by the closure of China's borders in 2018 as well as by the entry into force of the Ban Amendment in 2019 and the Plastics Amendment in 2021 of the Basel Convention. All this within efforts to achieve a legally binding International Plastics Treaty and in the face of pronouncements from the UN Special Rapporteur on Chemicals emphatic in pointing out that it is the responsibility of States to avoid exposure to chemical and plastic pollution, as well as the need to put an end to incineration for its negative impacts on health, the environment and human rights. All this within a national context that is paradoxically contrary to what should be being done, by incentivizing these toxic imports and promoting the incineration of waste and plastics.

Main Findings:

- Plastic waste exports to Mexico increased from 2018 to 2021 by 121%, despite the entry into force of the Basel Convention Plastics Amendment in January 2021.
- The highest annual growth of these total plastic waste exports to Mexico was in 2020 of 64.7%.
- The United States accounts for more than 90% (SIAVI 94% and DATASUR 98%) of imports. Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and China together account for only 3% of the total volume.
- The most shipped type of plastic in the period under review was the ambiguous heading 391590 (other plastics) with 40%. Within this heading, the imports that increased the most was the subheading for PET waste, representing 24%.
 - The subheading that increased the most in volume from 2015 to 2021 is 39159002 (Waste, parings and scrap of polyethylene terephthalate PET) going from 2 thousand to almost 68 thousand tons.
 - Polyethylene terephthalate and PET trimmings (39159002) is the type of plastic waste whose volume of shipments from the US grew the most. In 2020, it quadrupled the volume shipped the previous year, going from just over 3 thousand tons to over 20 thousand tons. By 2021, it was more than 38 thousand tons.
- The increase in imports observed for subheading 39151001 (Of polymers of ethylene) was 14% and for 39152002 (Of polymers of styrene) 5%. Tariff subheading 39159099 (Other plastics) accounted for more than one-third (38%) of total plastic scrap exports to Mexico from 2015 to 2021.
- Between 2015 and August 2022, the export of plastic waste from the US to Mexico represented a value of US\$225 million, and again the most important tariff item was "other plastics".
- For the period 2015 to August 2022, exports of plastic waste to Mexico were made through border cities via land. From Laredo, Texas entered 58%, followed by San Diego, California with 22%, El Paso, Texas with 13% and Nogales, Arizona with 5%.
- Tamaulipas customs entered through most of the total imports, representing 50.56%, and the customs office with the highest volume of imports is Tijuana, with almost 27%.

Once this plastic waste enters Mexican territory, there is no monitoring and follow-up by the environmental authority as to what type of treatment it receives or where it is managed. One of the hypotheses that we continue to investigate is that it ends up in landfills and is used as fuel in cement kilns.

Relevant data on the investigation of Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF):

- A total of 33 sites and/or facilities located in 19 states of the Mexican Republic that operate co-processing and energy "recycling" processes as RDF were mapped.
- Using data from INEGI 2020, we documented the proximity of urban and rural settlements that are being impacted at each facility, without having assessed the impact. This gives us an approximate idea of the population exposed to pollution

generated by facilities that co-process waste that generate emissions of dioxins, sulfur, heavy metals, among others.

- Greenwashing practices related to CDR have been detected by cement companies and companies that have obvious plastic production projects. These companies have developed apparently sustainable and climate-friendly communication strategies.
- Companies that use and/or produce RDF in national territory may be operating under the cover of a legal loophole. The CDR, being a mixture of household, special handling and hazardous waste, makes it difficult to clarify both its legal definition and the framework of its competence.

The Malditos Plásticos Collective points out that the objective of this work is to make visible the problem of plastic waste colonialism in Mexico and demands that plastic waste imports from any part of the world be stopped and banned. That countries take responsibility for their own waste; that compliance with the Basel Convention, the Ban Amendment and the application of the Plastics Amendment be reviewed in a precautionary manner and with a life cycle approach. End incineration and co-processing of waste; reduce the production of plastics and start with a federal ban on single-use plastics.

Links to platform and reports:

Plastic waste colonialism. <https://mexicotoxico.org.mx/colonialismo-basura/>

Plastic waste, refuse-derived fuels and cement plants in Mexico. <https://mexicotoxico.org.mx/accionecologica/>

Report and executive summary available at: https://ipen.org/sites/default/files/documents/basura_plastica_cdr_y_cementeras_mexico.pdf

Contact information:

Plastic Waste Colonialism : José Manuel Arias ciudadanocero.tabasco@gmail.com

Plataforma CDR : Acción Ecológica: Larisa de Orbe accionecologicamex@gmail.com

Comunicaciones / Communication (español): Fronteras Comunes: Mariana Linares linaresmorales.m@gmail.com