



press release

Infamous Chinese e-Waste Town Finally Closes Doors to Imports

Watchdog Groups Applaud Clean-up Efforts at Guiyu, Warn of New Destinations

December 17, 2015. Seattle, Washington; Guiyu, Guangdong Province, China. Basel Action Network (BAN), the environmental watchdog organization that in 2001 first discovered the global electronic waste dumping ground in Guiyu, China, together with the Society of Canton Nature Conservation, have confirmed after a visit last week that the Chinese government has finally moved to place strict controls on informal e-waste recycling operations and has also prohibited the entry of foreign e-waste into the Guiyu area.

As of December 1 of this year, by order of regional authorities, all work on e-waste was to be moved and confined to a large 1.5 billion yuan (\$233 million US) industrial park (Guiyu Circular Economy industrial park). Furthermore, all e-waste coming into the industrial park must arrive at one central receiving location where it is now screened to disallow foreign e-waste. While China has long had a national e-waste import ban, it was never adequately enforced in Guiyu until now.



New industrial park units for circuit board cooking, showing new chimney system. Copyright BAN 2015.

Since first exposing the illegal importation and horrific pollution in Guiyu fourteen years ago, BAN and others have campaigned tirelessly for an end to the global toxic e-waste trade, and for an end to dirty, informal recycling such as that found in Guiyu. BAN has brought the issue to the United Nation's Basel Convention, to the Chinese and US governments, and eventually to the electronics recycling industry in Europe and North America when governments

failed to act.

"This day of action in Guiyu has been promised for over a decade, and it is truly remarkable to finally see it first hand," said BAN Executive Director Jim Puckett. "We are relieved that the clean-up has begun, and that the efforts of many are resulting in real improvements in the lives and environment around Guiyu. The celebration is dampened, however, by how long it has taken, how much damage has been done, and concerns about the future. Unless halted at the source, the Guiyu waste now turned away by Chinese enforcement may simply find new destinations."

It was Puckett's cameras, in 2001 that first recorded the massive export of e-waste to Guiyu and the dangerous and highly polluting backyard recycling operations performed by migrant workers there. These findings were published in a report and film entitled *"Exporting Harm: The High-Tech Trashing of Asia"*, released in February of 2002. Since that time BAN has regularly travelled to Guiyu to witness developments. In 2008, Puckett travelled with CBS's 60 Minutes to record the episode *"The Wasteland"*, which to date is the most awarded 60 Minutes episode ever created. His last trip, in 2013, still showed massive importation and polluting operations proliferating.

BAN also took the first analytical soil and water samples in Guiyu, revealing gross contamination. Today scientists have further affirmed the severe toxic impacts of dirty e-waste recycling, including on children's health. A [recent study](#) continues to show, for example, alarming lead levels in the blood in the children of Guiyu. It is expected that, despite the recent developments, the soil and groundwater will remain severely contaminated for some time, as heavy metals are immortal.

Chinese e-waste activist, Mr. Lai Yun, who is now the Founder and Executive Director of the Society of Canton Nature Conservation, accompanied Puckett on the recent visit. His new organization is focused on environmental education.

"When I talk to children, I share with them the story of Guiyu and how the environment, once polluted, will remain contaminated with heavy metals and persistent chemicals for centuries. Guiyu is a lesson that a 'war on pollution' that China has now undertaken is best fought through preventing the pollution in the first place."



Streets of Guiyu, now devoid of recycling activity. Copyright BAN 2015.

According to reports, the closure of the estimated 5,000 workshops in Guiyu began taking place in earnest in November. Last week, Puckett and Lai Yun witnessed the recycling streets of Guiyu as 'a ghost-town' with all operations shuttered and only a few abandoned piles of e-waste left behind in some yards and waysides. The old chimneys, behind which hundreds of women sat cooking circuit boards in shallow woks just a few months ago, have

been cut away and the holes cemented up. Large red banners hung across the roadways promising stiff fines and power being cut for any that fail to move to the industrial park.

Although their visit to the industrial park was unannounced, Puckett and Lai Yun received an official tour and spoke with the director. They were allowed to examine the incoming e-waste in the receiving area, as well as tour some of the new workshops inside the park. While creation of the industrial park is seen as an important step, the activists observed that the basic harmful technologies employed there remain the same. Massive hand cooking of circuit boards is still occurring, albeit with exhaust hoods and lead-tin fumes now sucked into chimneys and scrubbed before release.



Waste piled up outside new industrial park workshops. Copyright BAN 2015.

It is also noteworthy that the volumes of e-waste now in the industrial park are not nearly as large as what was witnessed in Guiyu recently. This begs the question, 'where did it all go?' Finally, a bigger question looms: If Guiyu is no longer an allowable destination for the massive flows of e-waste trade, 'where will the e-waste exported from developed countries now end up?'

"We applaud the actions of the Chinese government to finally enforce their hazardous waste import ban, and to begin to protect their citizens and environment from e-waste pollution in Guiyu," said Puckett. "We fear, however, that the externalization of costs and harm will simply continue to new locations as long as countries like the United States allow exports of hazardous wastes with impunity. China has now taken responsibility for trying to control this illegal trade on their end; it is time for the exporting nations to do the same."

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Website of new industrial park: <http://www.cgce.gov.cn/about.html>

See more pictures here: www.ban.org/news/2015/12/16/infamous-chinese-e-waste-town-finally-closes-doors-to-imports

About Basel Action Network

Founded in 1997, the 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 or blog.BAN.org.

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