

While several challenges confront our recycling systems and create the imperative for high-performing deposit return system, we detail here two of the most pressing ones.

1 China National Sword

The final destination of the material intercepted by curbside and other recycling programs has been questionable.

For decades, much of the recyclable waste the US produced was shipped to China, where it was accepted and processed with little regard for quality. That practice all but ended in 2017 when the Chinese government passed a series of policies known as the China National Sword, banning the import of some materials, and establishing tight restrictions on the amount of contamination permitted in others. These new policies resulted in a 41% decline in the value of curbside residential recycling materials between 2017 and 2020. ²⁰

The US's long dependence on China to enable its broken system of overconsumption and careless disposal is over.

