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## Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016

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In order to strengthen the **implementation of environmentally sound management** of hazardous waste in the country, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has **amended the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016**.

### **Salient features of the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Amendment Rules, 2019:**

- **Solid plastic waste** has been **prohibited from import into the country** including in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and by Export Oriented Units (EOU).
- **Exporters of silk waste have now been given exemption** from requiring permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- **Electrical and electronic assemblies and components** manufactured in and exported from India, if found defective can now be imported back into the country, within a year of export, without obtaining permission from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Industries which do not require consent under Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1981, are now exempted from requiring authorization also under the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016, provided that hazardous and other wastes generated by such industries are handed over to the authorized actual users, waste collectors or disposal facilities.

## Background

- India's imports of solid plastic waste **quadrupled (increased fourfold)** from 12,000 tonnes in the fiscal year 2016-17 to 48,000 tonnes in FY 2017-18.
- India **banned the import of plastic waste** – particularly PET bottles – in 2015 because of an **inability to recycle them**.

Experts suggest that most of the plastic waste does not make it to the recycling

centres due to lack of an **efficient waste segregation and inadequate collection.**

- However, the **Centre allowed agencies** in special economic zones (SEZ) to **import them in 2016.** This was the legal loophole which led to an influx of PET bottles into the country.

## PET Bottles

- PET, which stands for **polyethylene terephthalate, is a form of polyester** (just like the clothing fabric). It is extruded or molded into plastic bottles and containers for packaging foods and beverages, etc.
- It is highly **valued packaging material** because it is strong yet lightweight, non-reactive, economical, and shatterproof.
- Moreover, China, which was once a major global importer of plastic waste for recycling, had **recently banned imports** and therefore plastic wastes could be **making their way to India instead.**
- Plastic **unsuitable for recycling is burnt, which releases toxic chemicals** into the atmosphere. Or it ends up in landfill, potentially **contaminating soil and water sources.**

## India's Plastic Waste Industry

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- Before China banned the import of plastic waste, **India was the 10<sup>th</sup> largest importer of plastic scrap.** However, there was a **“substantial increase” in import** which shows that India has emerged as one of the alternatives for recycling plastic waste.
- India recycles a **higher percentage of plastic waste internally than other, richer countries.**
  - A 2012 study found that 56% of plastic waste produced in India is recycled.
  - The process of collecting and separating plastic waste is largely an **informal sector activity, providing employment to many.**
  - However, concerns remain **regarding the widespread usage of plastic.** Experts say while recycling is a good practice, the focus **must remain on reducing usage.**
- While several states have indeed banned the usage of plastic bags, the regulations soon come undone.

Maharashtra's ban on plastic items failed because of **intense lobbying, lack of alternatives and also damage to the livelihood of those depending on manufacturing plastic and collecting plastic waste.**