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LAHORE: Pakistan has imported over 110,000 tons of plastic scrap in last three years without proper recycling infrastructure and monitoring framework in place, sources said on Wednesday.

There is no regulation questioning why we are lifting all kinds of plastic scrap from world over despite lacking the basic recycling facilities in the country, they added.

According to sources in the Environmental Protection Department, plastic scrap is primarily imported by traders who do not have recycling facilities with traditional setups in populous residential areas such as Shershah Karachi and Shahdara Lahore, exposing millions of people to hazardous plastic waste of virtually all kinds.

As per Pakistan's import policy order 2009 amended as per a statutory regulatory order 242(1) 2011, plastic scrap is only importable by manufacturers for their own use subject to the condition that they shall furnish to customs authorities a certificate from relevant government agency of the exporting countries that the goods are not hazardous and comply with the provision of the Basel Convention. Unfortunately, the Import Policy Order is not being implemented in its true spirit.

Further, the definition of manufacturer in existing policy is vague in nature and anyone registered individual with a sales tax number is considered as a manufacturer by custom authorities regardless of whether they have manufacturing and recycling facility to produce finish plastic product from scrap, they said. As per plastic recycling standards, the waste should be properly sorted, washed, cleaned and palletised before use in end product. However, unfortunately it is not being followed.

Additionally, they added, most of the scrap imported in the country is used in manufacturing of pressure pipes, which are not allowed as per Pakistan Standard 3051/1991 and other international standards such as British Standard 3505/1985, ASTM D-1785 -06 and ISO-4422-1:1996.

This use of scrap in pipe not only poses potential health hazard but is also damaging local plastic industry by pushing substandard product in the market.

Therefore, definition of manufacturer to be elaborated and should include manufacturer of plastic finished product using scrap to produce product as per designated Pakistani and international standards.

Sources informed that the recycling of plastic scrap is carried out in a five step process. Plastic collection is the first step, which is done through roadside collections, special recycling bins and directly from industries that use plastic.

In step two manual, sorting is done in which nails and stones are removed, and the plastic is sorted into three types: PET, HDPE and other.

In the third step, sorted plastic is cut into small pieces ready to be melted down.

Washing is the fourth step, which removes contaminants such as paper labels, dirt and remnants of the product originally contained in the plastic. In the fifth and last step the plastic is then melted down and extruded into small pellets ready for reuse.

They said that a proper recycling facility should have a proper washing and effluent management system to ensure that effluent does not exceed National Environment Quality Standard limits. In addition, residential areas should not be exposed to such effluents. During the chipping process, dust and fume generated release heavy metals such as lead and antimony, posing hazardous risk such as lead poisoning to those exposed.

During the melting of plastic, hazardous gases such as benzene and other harmful hydrocarbons are released, which are detrimental to human health. Ironically, the workers manning such facilities are not equipped with personnel protective to safeguard their health.

To make things worse, there is no monitoring of gaseous, liquid or solid waste emissions at these facilities or even the realisation of what hazards they entail. On the other hand, China has imposed strict regulation pertaining to import and treatment of plastic waste.

The country has also instructed local environmental protection agencies to

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inspect plastic recycling companies and publish list of qualified recyclers, along with those who fail inspections so that government could keep effective control on plastic scrap import and recycling.

Lastly, recyclers are not allowed to operate in residential areas and facilities without ample availability of water are not licensed to operate.</p> <p>◆</p><p>Courtesy: The News</p>