

## Bagging Plastics

THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT has banned the importation of used plastic because of its dangerous environmental impact. Minister of Trade Arifin Siregarwas announced the ban in late November.

Indonesian Attorney General Singgih found that 116 containers of imported used plastics and aluminum scrap from the United States, Singapore and Korea, which had been abandoned at the Customs and Excise Office in Tanjung Priok harbor, North Jakarta, contained chemicals which are harmful to human health.

According to Junior Minister of Trade Nasruddin Sumintapura, 16 importers — who obtained the used materials at no cost from foreign firms looking to get rid of the plastic and scrap — left the containers at the harbor in order to avoid transportation fees.

U.S. plastic recyclers sent over 35 million pounds of plastic waste to Indonesia in 1991 [See "Plastics: Trashing the Third World," *Multinational Monitor*, June 1992]. Indonesian workers, who were not provided with protective clothing or equipment, processed the waste by hand indoors in hot, crowded rooms with no ventilation systems and were exposed to toxic chemicals such as titanium dioxide, which causes respiratory damage. The reprocessed plastic was sent to manufacturing plants in Asia to be made into shoe soles, containers or toys. Much was unusable and was simply dumped in Indonesian landfills.

Imports of used plastics, which have been sold on the Indonesian recycling market since 1990, have hurt the business of the 30,000 scavengers and 900 junk dealers in the cities of Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang and Bekasi, who make their living collecting and recycling waste materials.

"We are thrilled to hear that Indonesia has banned plastic waste imports," says Ann Leonard, a waste trade campaigner for the environmental organization Greenpeace. "We hope that they will broaden the ban to cover all wastes and that other ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] countries will follow its lead and declare the entire region off-limits to international waste traffickers."

## Toxic Tithing

THE U.S. CONGRESS stipulated that 10 percent of the government-sponsored computer chip consortium Sematech's 1993 funding of \$100 million be designated for development of environmentally safe manufacturing methods. The bill also mandates that Sematech consult with appropriate environmental justice and labor rights organizations to determine priorities for these funds.

Led by the San Jose, California-based environmental organization Campaign for Responsible Technology (CRT), grassroots groups lobbied Congress for months to address problems of pollution and worker health and safety associ-

ated with the computer chip industry in the Southwest United States and in California's high-tech Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley has more Superfund cleanup sites than any other region in the United States because of groundwater contamination caused by electronics companies.

The environmental organizations behind the victory, including People Organized in Defense of the Earth and its Resources, Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Maricopa County Organizing Project and the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, are now urging the consortium's corporate backers to match the \$10 million allocated for environmental and worker-related concessions. Half of Sematech's annual budget comes from its 12 corporate members, and the other half from the federal government.

Rand Wilson, director of CRT, calls the congressional bill "a victory won by the communities of color that are adversely affected by the environmental racism of the high-tech industry."

"When grassroots activists suggested a year ago that Sematech should be involved in developing safer technologies we heard 'That's not our job,'" says Wilson. "Now the industry is being told that environmental safety is part of its job ... which makes this decision very significant."

## Halting Hyundai

A HYUNDAI JOINT LOGGING VENTURE announced in December that it will shut down its multi-million dollar logging operation in the forests of Southeastern Siberia. The announcement follows a Russian Supreme Court ruling against a logging operation on the Bikin River which threatened to destroy the lands and homes of about 2,000 indigenous Udege peoples.

The logging project, which was to be carried out by the South Korean Hyundai and the Russian logging company Svetlaya, involved clearcutting more than 300,000 hectares of land in the forests surrounding the Bikin river. The Udege people, who hunt and fish for their livelihoods, have lost land to previous logging concessions. The court judgment stipulates that areas of the forests, which serve as Udege hunting grounds and habitat for the endangered Ussurian tiger, are to be protected from development.

The Udege communities have demonstrated strong opposition to the project since Hyundai announced its plans in 1989, turning down compensation offers and waging a protracted campaign against the corporation by setting up peaceful blockades in the areas where Hyundai has started logging. Aditi Sharma, campaigns officer for the indigenous rights group Survival International, calls the Supreme Court decision to "back the land rights of indigenous people over the interests of developers and local authorities" an "historic success."

— Julie Gozari