

Press Release

In September of 2006, the Department of the Environment (DOE) was assigned the responsibility of the issuance of permits to export scrap metal under S.I. No. 77 of 2006 Customs Regulation (Prohibited and Restricted Goods) (Consolidation) (Amendment) Order 2006, which was passed on August 10, 2006 by the Minister of Finance. As such, the DOE had been issuing licences on a “free for all” basis to anyone making an application for the exportation of scrap metal. Subsequently, as a result of various illegal activities occurring within this sector, the DOE decided to institute new procedures to properly manage the exportation of scrap metal. The sector has been degrading to the level where antiquities and artifacts of historical value and parts of bridges were being cut and exported; also, copper materials from private companies and electrical wiring from abandoned homes were being stolen and exported.

The new procedures for receiving licences to export scrap metal had come into effect on 21st July 2008. More recently, after consultation with Customs and Immigration Departments, and again, as a result of an increase of illegal activities in the scrap metal sector, a few changes in “procedure” were instituted. The newly implemented policies are in line with the DOE’s mandate under the Environmental Protection Act to undertake investigations and inspections to ensure compliance with the Environmental Protection Act or associated regulations.

Notwithstanding, the illegal entries and exits of scrap metal-exporting vehicles continued unabated. At the request of the Ministry of National Security, the DOE ceased the issuance of licences effective 15th August 2008, until the issue was properly addressed by the Government. Further to the above-said, a meeting was held on August 21, 2008 with the participation of personnel from the Department of the Environment, Belize Defence Force, and Police, Transport, and Immigration Departments to discuss the outstanding issues needing address in the scrap metal sector. Several recommendations came out of this meeting for better coordination and monitoring amongst the competent authorities, including modifications to conditions of approval and the development of new legislation to control scrap metal. More importantly, the group reaffirmed the recommendation to keep the moratorium on the issuance of scrap metal licences in effect until further notice.

For more information, please contact Mr. Martin Alegria, Chief Environmental Officer, at the Department of the Environment at 822-2816/2542 or envirodept@btl.net.