

Textiles Squeeze on margins as costs escalate

In common with companies in most sectors of the recycling industry, used textiles sorters are not short of business worries at present. The rising costs of purchasing their raw material as well as thefts of, and from, collection containers were just two of the preoccupations discussed at the latest Textiles Round-Table in Barcelona.

A tough struggle' is how BIR Textiles Division President Olaf Rintsch of Germany-based Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus GmbH described current conditions for the used clothing sector. With prices of originals escalating towards a 'zenith', the impact on many sorting companies could be 'shorter working times' and even 'an early Christmas'. The imminent arrival of winter weather will serve to make the overall situation yet more difficult for the trade, he added.

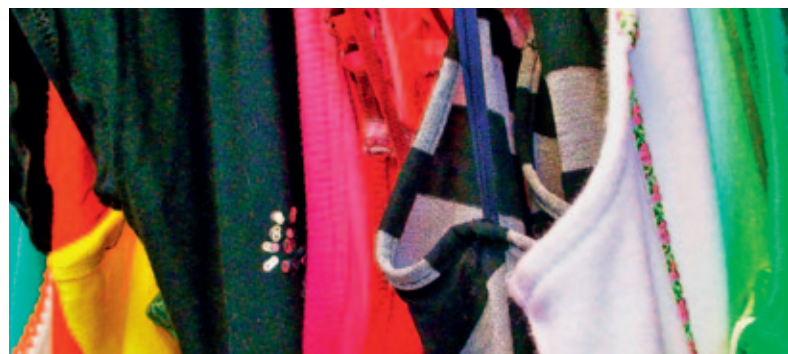
The division's Honorary President Klaus Löwer of Germany-based Hans Löwer Recycling GmbH also confirmed difficult conditions for US textiles sorters as well as a doubling of prices for originals in Japan, while the Italian market report submitted by Sauro Balzerini alluded to originals prices rising seemingly 'without limit'.

No clue about worth

In the UK market review delivered by the Textile Recycling Association's Alan

Wheeler, it was also recognised that trading conditions are becoming 'increasingly difficult'. But despite the fact that businesses are 'struggling', new entrants are continuing to filter into the industry 'because they think they will make a quick profit'. These new collectors often 'do not have a clue' how much the textiles are worth and yet they deprive established businesses of used clothing, thus helping to keep values high.

The main challenge in Belgium is to find enough original material to keep sorting plants running full-time, said Pol T'Jollyn of NV Recutex. Most companies do not have sufficient stock to see them through the coming winter and so the price of originals could escalate to the point where no margin is left, he suggested in Barcelona. Although demand from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe for sorted second-hand clothing remains 'very good', there is little scope for further increases in sales prices to compen-



sate for the higher costs associated with purchasing originals.

Container theft

In France, where collection volumes have been 12-15% lower during the second half of this year than in the corresponding period of 2011, the incidence of thefts of containers and of their contents has continued to rise, stated the Textiles Division's Vice President Mehdi Zerroug of Framimex. He also reported that, of the 150 000 tonnes collected during 2011, some

128 356 tonnes was sorted by companies engaged in the ECOTLC initiative. The continuing theft of containers was also lamented at the Barcelona meeting by Mr Rintsch who urged victims to make a report to the police. The divisional President also commented on the differing legal status of textiles 'waste' within Europe; for example, some countries consider clothes deposited in collection banks as 'waste' whereas others do not. This proliferation of different rules and regulations 'means it is difficult to make it all work', argued Mr Rintsch. □



BIR Textiles Division President Olaf Rintsch of Germany-based Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus.



Pol T'Jollyn of Belgium-based Recutex NV.



Textiles Division's Honorary President Klaus Löwer.

New initiatives expand recycling knowledge

There has been a general trend both within BIR and beyond to widen the knowledge base as part of the bid to improve and maximise recycling. The Textiles Round-Table in Barcelona turned the spotlight on two initiatives which have delivered on this score. In the UK, research published through the Clothing Roadmap has found that between 2.5 and 2.7 million tonnes of

textiles are consumed domestically each year, of which 1.1-1.4 million tonnes are in the form of clothing, it was revealed by the Textile Recycling Association's Alan Wheeler. In 2010, around 619 000 tonnes of clothing was collected for reuse and recycling, while the value of clothing sent to landfill is around Euro 175 million per annum. The research has also thrown

up another fascinating nugget of information: that the average UK household owns around Euro 5000 worth of clothes, of which approximately 30% 'has not been worn for at least a year'. And the Textiles Division's Honorary President Klaus Löwer welcomed an initiative in the USA to promote the concept of clothing as a recyclable product. As reported in the August

2012 issue of Recycling International, the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) has developed grade-appropriate educational materials for targeting at more than 750 000 educators, 15 million students and 20 million parents via modern information delivery media. One of the key messages is that 95% of all clothing and textiles can be recycled.