

Plastics and Tyres

Plastics market 'in turmoil'



The latest BIR convention in Düsseldorf provided the setting for the first-ever joint meeting of the world recycling organisation's Plastics and Tyres Committees. With four guest speakers, the event covered a broad range of subjects including market conditions, carbon credits, the EU's REACH chemical regulation, and investigations into the health & safety aspects of tyre-derived rubber infill used in artificial sports pitches.

It's a risky business at the moment - the best thing is to sleep a little later in the morning and go home earlier,' according to Peter Daalder of Daly Plastics in the Netherlands. Plastics Committee Chairman Surendra Borad of Belgium-based Gemini Corporation offered an equally candid summary of the market which he described as 'in turmoil' at the recent joint Round-Table meeting of BIR's Plastics and Tyres Committees.

According to the latter, market sentiment has been driven to some extent by the daily ration of gloomy economic and financial headlines. For his part, Mr Daalder expected greater stability to emerge after Chinese New Year 'or perhaps even earlier'. For the moment, however, buyers in Asia are experiencing financial problems and payments

have been affected. With high demurrage costs in many ports (for example, US\$ 75 per day in Hong Kong), 'you have to make a quick decision about what to do', he pointed out.

Prices likely to fall

Jacques Musa of Veolia Propreté France Recycling said of secondary plastics prices in China: 'We are still waiting for November prices but we surely know that they will be much lower than in the past months.' In his home market of France, he noted, plastics recyclers' sales since September have been 50% lower than last year. Conditions in some of the other key European markets - notably Italy and Spain - are broadly similar, he went on to say.

In India, primary plastics prices have dropped more than US\$ 500 per

tonne 'in sympathy with the world market'. And although exports of PET scrap to India have increased in recent times, he described the overall picture of shipments to this country as one of 'absolute dullness'.

Carbon credit call

Mr Borad reiterated a strong belief first expressed at BIR's 2008 Spring Convention in Monte-Carlo that 'plastics recycling reduces carbon emissions and therefore is eligible for carbon credits'. And he went further by adding: 'We should be entitled to Euro 25-30 per tonne.'

The Plastics Committee's Chairman was equally firm in this conviction after hearing two guest presentations on the subject. First, Dr Joachim Wuttke of Germany's Federal Environmental Agency argued that many EU countries harbour 'enormous potential' for reducing harmful gas emissions through increased recycling activity. And then

Markus Götz of carbon credit specialist FutureCamp GmbH, also of Germany, outlined some of the practical routes plastics recyclers may choose to follow in their bid to secure credits, although he also warned that 'there can be so many problems on the way'.



Plastics Committee Chairman Surendra Borad of Belgium-based Gemini Corporation (left) and BIR Tyres Committee Chairman Barend Ten Bruggencate of the Netherlands.



Dr Joachim Wuttke of Germany's Federal Environmental Agency was one of the guest speakers at the Plastics Committee meeting.

Focus on tyres

BIR Tyres Committee Chairman Barend Ten Bruggencate of the Netherlands suggested that the recycling industry has reason to be content with the finalised version of the EU's Waste Framework Directive, not least because recycling is given precedence over other recovery routes. It is also important that used tyres are in the category of materials for assessment in relation to end-of-waste criteria, he noted. However, accession countries in particular will struggle to meet the directive's goal of separate collection of paper, metals, plastics and glass by the year 2015, he added.

Guest speaker Dr Ulbert Hofstra of Intron BV in the Netherlands revealed the results of research into the leaching of zinc from tyre-derived rubber infill following concern over the presence of carcinogenic compounds - namely polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons - in car tyres. From these experiments, it has been concluded that the weathering impact on tyre-derived rubber crumb during the technical life-time of an artificial sports field does not cause leaching of zinc in quantities exceeding permissible threshold values. Exposure tests have also showed that 'there is no significant health risk to players from the use of rubber infill from recycled car tyres in artificial football pitches'. Fellow guest speaker Kees Wielenga of Ffact Management Consultants, also from the Netherlands, provided delegates with an insight into the EU's regulation on the Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals (REACH). His presentation is covered in a separate feature devoted to REACH (see page ?? of this issue).