

Give us 'the space to survive', Rintsch pleads

In the recycling fraternity, the non-ferrous scrap industry is not alone in suffering thefts of its feed material, namely high-value metals. The used clothing placed in collection containers has also become a magnet for thieves – and even for organised crime, it was reported in Shanghai.

'Unbelievable.' That was the response of re-elected BIR Textiles Division president Olaf Rintsch of Germany-based Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus to the news that used textiles are now the plunder of choice for some criminal gangs.

Alan Wheeler of the UK's Textile Recycling Association, the BIR Textiles Division's new general delegate, had just informed the meeting that the used clothing sector in his country 'is still being routinely targeted by criminal gangs'. Wheeler described the police response as 'variable', noting a recent case in which a gang was caught in the act of trying to steal clothing collected by a school and was found to have stolen goods worth several thousand dollars in its van. 'The attending officers did not appreciate the value of the items or the serious nature of the crime and simply let the offenders go without even issuing a police caution,' he said. 'It was a very frustrating affair.'



Alan Wheeler called on the police to recognise 'the seriousness of textile theft'.



As of late, prices of originals have reached 'a zenith', Olaf Rintsch declared.

According to the Textiles Division's vice president Mehdi Zerroug of Framimex in France, used clothing theft is carried out on a varying scale throughout Europe. In his own country, the used textiles sector has been hit by thefts of, and from, containers – and even by thefts perpetrated during the collection process itself.

The very survival of collections in France is under threat and yet the authorities appear to be 'not terribly interested' in taking action because the sector's goods are deemed to be among the 'less valuable', he contended. Zerroug identified benchmarking of enforcement actions from country to country as a possible way forward.

Surge of bankruptcies

The theme of survival was also taken up by Rintsch and Wheeler, the latter revealing to delegates that more than 10% of his association's membership has ceased trading in the last year or so, reportedly because some textiles collectors 'could not afford to continue paying the prevailing market prices' for originals. And he added: 'I suspect that there are more to come.' This surge in bankruptcies led to a small market oversupply and lower values

Textiles



early in 2013, but prices have since remained 'relatively stable'.

For his part, Rintsch warned how difficult market conditions and unfair competition have been damaging the traditional used textiles industry. Prices of originals have reached 'a zenith' and sorters are finding it 'almost impossible' to make profits. He continued: 'We have

'Ruimte voor streamer

been here through the good and the bad days, so we ought to be given the space to survive rather than allow the destruction of a branch that has been around for 200 years.' If the industry's survival continues to be threatened by its inability to obtain originals at reasonable prices, then a 'huge' number of jobs will be lost and 'taxpayers will have to pay'. He concluded: 'The conditions should be the same for us all.'

Margins under pressure

In Europe, the shoes market has been weakening, wiper prices 'need to go up' and 'we are far from covering our costs' on the recycling grades, Rintsch observed.

And market conditions have also been challenging beyond Europe, according to the round-up provided by the Textiles Division's honorary president Klaus Löwer of Hans Löwer Recycling in Germany. Although the 'overheated' demand for unsorted textiles has abated in North America, margins remain generally under 'major pressure', with more business closures likely. And in Japan, prices for collected textiles have increased by 100% while volumes have declined by 20%.

Growing volumes

A perspective on the market in China was provided by guest speaker Lin Shidong, secretary general of the China Chain Store and Franchise Association (CCFA) Recycled Fibre Commission. Growing volumes of used clothes are being discarded in line with the general improvement in living standards but education and strong policy leadership are required to achieve a potential reuse level of close to 60%. There is also a need to upgrade technologies to boost recycling, he added.

The speaker confirmed that China exports some sorted used clothing, notably to Africa, but that the majority of the collected material is reused domestically. Löwer welcomed this insight into textiles recycling in China as well as the potential for closer collaboration between the country and BIR. □

Recovered plastics demand to scale 'incredible' heights

Global consumption of recovered plastics has almost trebled over the last six years and will probably double again by the year 2020, researchers believe. 'A big business indeed,' BIR Plastics Committee chairman Surendra Borad told the meeting in Shanghai with his trademark enthusiasm.

Already on a sharp upward curve, worldwide demand for recovered plastics will gallop to an 'incredible' total by the end of this decade, delegates to the BIR Plastics Committee meeting in Shanghai were informed by chairman Surendra Borad of Gemini Corporation in Belgium.

From a level of 15m tonnes as recently as 2007, leading industry consultant Poyry expects annual global consumption to soar to 45 million tonnes by 2015, and then on to 85 million tonnes by 2020, Borad explained. And Chinese demand alone could reach 29 million

tonnes per annum in a couple of years from now, he noted from CBI China projections. China (including Hong Kong) is currently importing 8-9 million tonnes of plastics scrap each year while domestic collection is around 13 million tonnes, Borad pointed out.

Widening the scope of his presentation to cover the entire global waste and recycling industry, Borad reminded delegates of his suggestion a couple of years ago that this was worth US\$ 500 billion a year. 'I was wrong,' he confessed in Shanghai. 'It is worth US\$ 1000 billion - a trillion.' And the volume of



Plastics

business is growing by more than US\$ 200 million per day, he added. Borad's updated figures, based on a Bank of America Merrill Lynch Global Research report entitled 'No time to waste', illustrate that 'you and me are in a very good business - the business of the 21st century', he told delegates.

Not as much as perceived

Turning to international movements of material, Borad confirmed that he had recently urged the European Commission to make a clearer distinction between 'illegal shipments' and 'shipments in violation of the EU regulation'; those in the latter category 'may be due to missing papers or incomplete or inaccurate paperwork or administrative mistakes' rather than to a deliberate attempt to mislead. The volume of illegal shipments from Europe 'may not be as much as it is perceived to be', he contended.

In the review of the Dutch and German markets submitted by Peter Daalder of Daly Plastics in the Netherlands, he highlighted the reduction in exported volumes as a result of China's stricter import procedures. The report from Michael Schipper of International Alloys noted a plastics scrap

oversupply in the USA owing to China's 'Green Fence' policy and a subsequent price reduction of 15% in some instances.

Renwu Cai, general manager of Guangzhou GISE-MBA New Plastics Technology, said that 'Green Fence' was designed to 'crack down on illegal enterprises' but that even law-abiding companies have been hit by customs clearance delays and thus additional costs. And Dr Steve Wong, managing director of China's Fukutomi Co., said 'Green Fence' has forced many domestic consumers to pay more for their scrap, harming their competitiveness. Gregory Cardot of Veolia Propreté spoke of the increasing number of French plastics recyclers and converters which are 'in receivership or bankrupt'. He said: 'Payment terms are not respected and delays are increasing.' In contrast, the Indian market is 'doing rather well' and providing 'reasonable demand', said Borad. □

Europe edges closer to 100% tyre collection rate

Europe has achieved an all-time-high tyre recovery rate of 98%, it was revealed at the BIR Tyres Committee meeting in Shanghai by its chairman Barend Ten Bruggencate of VACO in the Netherlands. This figure compares to the 75% recorded as recently as 2004 and reflects a massive reduction in the landfilling of used tyres. He also noted that used tyre retreading in Europe dropped sharply with the onset of the economic crisis in 2008 and subsequently recovered almost to 2007 levels before reaching a plateau. Pang Shuhua, vice president and secretary general of the China Tyre Retreading, Repairing and Recycling

Association, drew a sharp distinction between 'used' and 'waste' tyres: with the former, only the surface has been damaged such that the core is still suitable for retreading; with the latter, however, the damage extends to the core and retreading is not permitted on safety grounds. China does not allow 'waste' tyres to be imported and their prices domestically are perhaps the highest in the world, he told delegates.

The speaker also highlighted environmental problems in China caused by the widespread practice of using 'backward' technologies to extract fuel oil from spent tyres.



Barend Ten Bruggencate told delegates that Europe's tyre recovery rate grew from 75% in 2004 to 98% last year.



The entire global waste and recycling industry is worth around US\$1 trillion, reported Surendra Borad.