

Plastics

Recycling – a US\$ 500 billion industry?

In the September issue of Recycling International, we reported on a study funded by the US Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) which concluded that, in America alone, the economic impact of the scrap recycling industry will amount to more than US\$ 90 billion in 2011. Furthermore, it indicated that people and firms that purchase, process and broker scrap materials to be manufactured into new products provide almost 460 000 people with jobs in the USA.



Taking these findings as well as data from China as his guide, BIR Plastics Committee Chairman Surendra Borad of Gemini Corporation NV in Belgium calculated the worth of the global recycling industry at 'approaching a figure of US\$ 500 billion or half a trillion US dollars'. He also suggested that the industry is employing between 16 and 20 million people around the world, and that it is 'growing at a tremendous rate that is faster than GDP'.

'Sad story'

Mr Borad acknowledged that, for the moment, there is some 'doom and gloom' around the business. He noted in particular that the market in India is

'absolutely dormant' as many company licences to import plastics scrap have not been renewed. It is 'a sad story', he said, that India does not encourage plastics scrap imports; on the upside, however, the country's domestic recycling industry is 'doing extremely well' and is claimed to be achieving a recycling rate of 47% compared to 25% in Europe. Prices in the USA are 'under pressure', continued Mr Borad. Suppliers have not reduced prices substantially until now 'but we expect them to come down sharply in the near future', he said.

Filling in more of the market picture, Gregory Cardot of Veolia Propreté in France suggested that volumes of quality regrind and reprocessed materials

have been barely sufficient to cover demand in his domestic market. 'Most probably, this will help prices not to drop much,' he commented. The same speaker went on to note a slight drop-off in activity levels for the country's recyclers since mid-October.

For China, meanwhile, Mr Cardot reported that there have been significant problems at ports and the market is 'under pressure'.

WEEE focus

In addition to the normal round of market reports, there was a special focus on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) at the BIR Plastics Round-Table in Munich.

Guest speaker Dr Rainer Koehnlechner, owner and Managing Director of separation specialist Hamos GmbH of Germany, explained that it is possible to derive high-purity polymers from mixed WEEE plastics. Using, for example, sink/float technology incorporating a special salt solution suitable for subsequent electrostatic separation, the company has been able to separate out ABS, polypropylene and polystyrene at purity

Tyres

Falling fees for ELTs

The high value of producer responsibility scheme funds in Europe will ensure that collection fees for end-of-life tyres (ELTs) continue to fall throughout Europe, the BIR Tyres Committee meeting in Munich was told by its Chairman, Barend Ten Bruggencate of the Netherlands. ELT management costs in the EU-27 amount to some Euro 600 million per annum, he added. Mr Ten Bruggencate went on to emphasise the importance of developing more precise standards for ELT-derived shred, crumb and powder in order to maximise consumer confidence in the uniformity of these materials. Quoting the most recent figures from the European Tyre & Rubber Manufacturers' Association (ETRMA), Mr Ten Bruggencate also confirmed that 2.494 million tonnes of used tyres were recovered in the 27 member states of the EU in 2009. The region achieved an average recycling rate of 95% that year, he added.



levels of more than 98.5%. The company's Wersag facility near Dresden has been achieving production rates of more than 2 tonnes per hour, he pointed out.

Threshold 'disadvantage'

No flame retardants are to be found in these end products, Dr Koehnlechner stressed to delegates. And right on cue, fellow guest speaker Tilman Baehr from the Hamburg Ministry of Urban Development and Environment in Germany identified brominated flame retardants as a key problem component of WEEE-derived plastics scrap, going on to acknowledge as 'a disadvantage' the fact that no binding thresholds have been set for them.

Mr Baehr went on to confirm that the revision of the EU's WEEE Directive is 'close to the finishing line' given that it has already reached the second reading stage in the European Parliament. □



Tilman Baehr of the Hamburg Ministry of Environment.



Surendra Borad, President of BIR's Plastics Division.



Guest speaker Dr Rainer Koehnlechner of Hamos.