

Textiles

'Unauthorised' collectors turn the supply screw

Europe's long-established textiles recyclers are facing something of a double-whammy at present: not only are originals difficult and expensive to obtain, but also the activities of so-called 'unauthorised' operators are making competition for volume ever more intense.

Winter is fast approaching in Europe but sorters have been unable to fulfil the age-old practice of building up stocks ahead of the colder months. And to make the supply situation even more precarious, established textiles recyclers are facing competition from 'those who do not follow the law', it was suggested at the Round-Table meeting in Munich.

The proliferation of 'unauthorised' collection containers has been proving detrimental to deep-rooted recycling businesses, according to BIR Textiles Division President Olaf Rintsch of Germany-based Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus GmbH. 'We need to do something about this', he suggested,

as the market for originals is currently 'very competitive'.

In reviewing the French market, divisional Vice President Mehdi Zerroug of Framimex highlighted the emerging practice of 'setting up containers near official ones but without permission' and also alluded to thefts from containers. Competition has been more intense from those using 'unorthodox methods' at a time when supply of originals 'is far lower than demand'.

Arrests made

This issue was covered in more detail in the UK market report presented by Alan Wheeler of the UK's Textile Recycling Association. 'Yields from collections are decreasing as both legal and illegal competition for collections increases and thefts continue,' he said. The UK's National Fraud Intelligence Bureau has undertaken a nationwide campaign to raise awareness among law enforcement agencies of the seriousness of charity bag fraud. 'A number of police operations have taken place in the past few months, many of them covered in the national media,' Mr Wheeler observed. 'This has led to a number of arrests and the closing down of several illegal operations.'



Dina Mehta, Textile Consultant European Outdoor Group.



Kilian Hochrein of garment producer WL Gore & Associates.



Klaus Löwer, Sauro Ballerini and Mehdi Zerroug in discussion.



By Ian Martin

Considerable fall

Agreeing with fellow speakers that 'wares are being acquired illegally', the Textiles Division's Honorary President Klaus Löwer of Germany-based Hans Löwer Recycling GmbH confirmed that supply concerns are not peculiar to Europe. In Japan, for example, collection volumes have slid around 10% while demand for wipers has now begun to recover after having sustained a 'considerable fall' in the aftermath of the earthquake in March this year. In the USA, meanwhile, prices of originals have climbed between 10% and 25% depending on the region. In reports from other European markets, Sauro Ballerini of Italy said he expects the shortage of originals to keep prices at high levels for the rest of the year. And Pol T'Jollyn of NV Recutex in Belgium emphasised that there is 'a long way to go' to solve the problem of subsidised competition.

Needing collaboration

The two guest presentations at the Textiles Round-Table were delivered by representatives of clothing producer organisations. Firstly, Dina Mehta - Textile Consultant with the European Outdoor Group - explained that this organisation, which represents the common interests of the outdoor industry, has established a sustainability working group aimed at improving the sector's environmental footprint. She invited input from clothing recycling experts such as those found in BIR

membership, stating: 'We understand that we need collaborations to drive forward and develop the end-of-life (management) of our garments.'

Fellow guest speaker Kilian Hochrein of US-based garment producer W. L. Gore & Associates made a similar point: speaking on behalf of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition whose members represent around 30% of global apparel retail value, he confirmed that this recently-developed entity would welcome the recycling industry into affiliate membership. Mr Löwer suggested co-operation with such ventures could help to improve the reputation and standing of the textiles recycling industry. 'We need a better image,' he declared, 'and this is a very good beginning.'

Never 'waste'

In other matters, Mr Rintsch confirmed to the Round-Table meeting that a hold has been put on the process within the EU to devise end-of-waste criteria for used textiles. On this point, Michael Sigloch of Gras & Sigloch GmbH & Co. stressed the belief within the German Federal Association of Secondary Raw Material and Waste Management (BVSE) that textiles and footwear are 'at no time waste' and so should never be considered under end-of-waste procedures. When members of the public put up items of clothing or shoes for collection, 'they have a certain purpose in mind for them - that they are to be used again,' he said. □