



## BIR council hears updates on China situation

Bureau's International Environment Council hears from ISRI and EuRIC leaders.

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At its 2017 autumn event, the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) International Environment Council devoted its meeting time almost entirely to China's import ban affecting certain secondary raw materials. The Brussels-based organization met in mid-October in New Delhi.

During a panel discussion moderated by BIR President Ranjit Singh Baxi, Robin Wiener, president of the Washington-based Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI), said the latest policy developments in China reflect a multipronged strategy published in July 2017, the goals of which include prohibiting imports of solid waste that entail "major environmental hazards and intense public reaction" by the end of 2017; halting imports that can be replaced by domestic resources; greater customs enforcement; refinement of laws, regulations and related systems; and bolstering increased domestic recycling.

Wiener said self-sufficiency in scrap is "an important driver" for the Chinese government. She also said a proposed 0.3 percent contamination ceiling for imported materials constitutes "an effective ban" because, among recyclers she has spoken on this issue, "no one thinks they can meet that threshold."

For the United States' recycling sector, China's actions have the potential to affect \$ 6.5 billion of annual exports and 150,000 related jobs. Some U.S. municipalities have stopped accepting certain papers and plastics in their curbside collection programs, Wiener said, adding that has been "a big force for us in raising this issue with the U.S. government." Meetings have already taken place with the White House and members of the U.S. Congress among others, she added.

Emmanuel Katrakis, the secretary general of the Brussels-based European Recycling Industries' Confederation (EuRIC), said his organization's response has included gathering information from members about the specific impacts of China's policy, so the European Commission can be armed with "hard data" when mounting its case.

IEC council members underlined the need for the global recycling industry to continue to work together on common arguments and to encourage the involvement of China's manufacturers and consumers of imported secondary raw materials, with several contributors to the debate saying the import ban has the potential to be highly damaging to China's own businesses.

BIR Director General Arnaud Brunet focused on the lessons that must be learned from recent policy developments in China, calling on national recycling associations to watch for "signals" of similar changes taking place in other countries, "because we have to be ready," he stressed.

Governments need to be shown the benefits of partnering with recycling industry professionals, said Brunet, adding, "because we have good practices; we are the good guys." Brunet is scheduled to travel to China in November, where he hopes to meet key officials and to gain an understanding of "the next step" and "where they are going."

Michael Lion, president of Hong Kong-based metals trading firm Everwell Resources, and chair of BIR's International Trade Council, emphasized that China's President Xi Jinping has taken "a very personal interest" in the improvement of the country's environment. The challenge for recycling industry representatives, he said, is to gain access to people "at the highest political level" within China and to explain "in a helpful and respectful way" how the recycling industry can work with them to a solution that is "commercially and socially advantageous to them."

In reviewing BIR activities at the level of intergovernmental organizations, its trade and environment director Ross Bartley said a UNEP-Basel Convention Expert Working Group is in the process of reviewing various annexes of the Convention that have relevance to scrap materials. BIR is "in a good position" regarding this debate, not least because it has "engagement in the Expert Working Group," he added.