



Bureau of International Recycling

Keeping the global picture

It was often said in the past that the ripples of events in the USA would eventually wash the shores of Europe. This still holds true today; but increasingly in this globalised economy, we are all affected by events throughout the world.

For this reason, among many others, there is a paramount need for an organisation which can promote and protect the interests of the global recycling industry - something which the BIR has been doing for more than 60 years. Our remit is to tackle issues of relevance to recyclers around the world, whether their interests lie in scrap metals, recovered paper or any one of a host of other recyclables.

« An organisation which can promote and protect the interests of the global recycling industry »

The organisation has a flourishing divisional structure which allows us to respond to the specific needs of the ferrous scrap, non-ferrous scrap, recovered paper and used textiles industries; at the same time, individual committees focus on stainless steel & special alloys, plastics and tyres. Our structure also incorporates the International Environment Council whose formation in 2002 illustrates how a rapid, proactive response to legislative developments has become core to BIR's modus operandi.

Furthermore, we have recently launched an International Trade Council which will focus its efforts on the increasingly complex business issues facing our members, for example, free trade and the recycling industry's relationships with companies in partner sectors such as banking, shipping and insurance.

Membership of BIR is truly international and intercontinental: its 750-plus member companies include many of the largest names in the global recycling sphere; in addition, a further 40 national recycling federations from the biggest industrialised

nations across the globe are affiliated to our organisation's ranks. Overall, BIR members are to be found in more than 70 countries which, together, account for some two-thirds of the world's population.

BIR has developed a strong presence and standing in the developed regions of Europe and, of course, North America where it has enjoyed an excellent working relationship with its US-American member association Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) over many years. And BIR has also understood the importance of building its membership and contacts within the emerging economies of the world, such as China, India and in the Middle East.

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BIR began developing closer relations with China as far back as the early 1990s. Thus, when China's Administration of Quality, Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) signalled its intention several years ago to introduce a registration scheme for overseas suppliers of recyclables, BIR helped to ensure that the recycling industry's perspective was heard at the highest official levels. Subsequently, BIR has assisted recycling companies in obtaining - and renewing - the permits required to trade with this major consumer of recyclables.

Also in recent years, when India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) was considering the introduction of an import ban on all forms of unshredded metal scrap, BIR and ISRI stood shoulder to shoulder with India's steel producers in lobbying - successfully - for this proposal to be abandoned.

In this context, it should be remembered that BIR has been a powerful advocate of free trade for many decades. In the 1970s, for instance, the organisation played a key role in securing the progressive demise of EU quotas to the point where they were removed altogether.

These examples reflect the high profile and the esteem in which BIR is held around the world. In crucial legislative matters, the world body participates at the highest level: for example, it maintains an active presence at meetings of the United Nations' Basel Convention and of the OECD's Working Group on Waste Prevention and Recycling. It also works closely with decision-makers within the European Commission and Parliament as well as at



the World Trade Organization, thereby ensuring that the industry's views are heard and weighed.

These close relationships have undoubtedly served

to develop an ever greater understanding of the environmental and commercial value of recycling among legislators. It is particularly pleasing to note that, after many years of campaigning by BIR with the assistance of its EU daughter associations, the recent revision of the EU Waste Framework Directive acknowledges the vital role of recycling in the waste management hierarchy by placing it above all other forms of recovery. This is the first time that such recognition has featured in a legal text. After decades spent challenging the use of the term "waste" to describe our industry's processed secondary raw materials, BIR and the recycling industry at large can justifiably celebrate this breakthrough.

And the work of BIR goes beyond legislative and commercial matters. Through its International Environment Council (IEC), which is comprised of a network of recycling specialists from around the world, BIR has provided technical advice on a wide spectrum of issues such as environmentally sound management. It has contributed to work at United Nations level aimed at minimising and managing contamination incidents caused by loss of control of radioactive sources by governments. And it has closely engaged with the UN, the OECD and the EU on regulations relating to shipments of "waste", in particular to non-OECD countries.

« World Recycling Conventions which serve as excellent networking opportunities »

With the active support of ISRI, BIR is participating in the Basel Convention's PACE working group whose goal is to agree guidelines for the environmentally sound management of used and end-of-life computing equipment. This follows on from a similar initiative relating to mobile phones in which BIR and ISRI also shared an active involvement.

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of BIR's global perspective lies in its efforts to quantify the beneficial impact of recycling on our planet's environment and climate. In this context, BIR commissioned a study carried out by the Imperial College of London, which revealed that the recycling of seven metals plus recovered paper reduces emissions of carbon dioxide - the leading greenhouse gas - by well over 500 million tonnes per annum, which is equivalent to approaching 2% of global fossil fuel emissions.

« In May this year, the BIR Spring Convention will break new ground when alighting in Dubai »

The actual emission saving seems likely to be far greater and so the work does not stop here: it is the stated intention of BIR to develop a statistical database that, through a regular reporting structure, will not only confirm the scale of the recycling industry's "green" contribution but also highlight its progress in terms of conserving natural resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This will be no simple task but it is one that BIR believes is essential to enhancing the profile of the recycling industry among legislators, decision-makers and the general public.

Over the six decades since its formation, BIR has become particularly well known for its twice-yearly World Recycling Conventions which serve as excellent networking opportunities while also addressing up-to-the-minute issues and market developments through specific commodity sessions and a programme of workshops. The practical nature of these gatherings was typified by our most recent Convention in Düsseldorf, at which BIR drew together experts who were able to provide recyclers with the most up-to-the-minute advice on the EU's regulation on the Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals (REACH), the aim of which is to make persons placing chemicals on the market responsible for understanding and managing the risks associated with their use.

To an increasing extent, BIR has aimed to stage its Conventions in the most appropriate venues from a geographical perspective: for instance, our 2006 Spring Convention took place in Beijing as the impact of China on the global recycling markets became fully understood; our 2007 Autumn Convention was held in the Polish capital of Warsaw at a time when EU expansion was creating an ever-sturdier commercial bridge between Western and Eastern Europe; and in May this year, the BIR Spring Convention will break new ground when alighting in Dubai at an important time in the Middle East's infrastructure and recycling industry development.

In recent years, our Conventions have been attracting record-breaking attendances while our membership numbers have continued to rise - sure signs that BIR has come up with a winning formula that appeals to a vast range of recycling specialists around the world.



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