

BIR Tyres & Rubber Committee discusses crumb rubber's negative press

Thirteen bills have emerged in the USA so far in 2017 targeting crumb rubber used in artificial turf.

May 30, 2017

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Speaking during the 2017 Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) World Recycling Convention, Robin Weiner, president of the Washington-based Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) said, although more than 90 separate pieces of research have concluded no risks are attached to the use of crumb rubber in synthetic turf, the issue “is not going away” and will not do so until “a definitive study” has been published.

Despite this body of research, negative media reports surrounding crumb rubber use in artificial turf have prompted some U.S. jurisdictions to delay purchasing decisions, while 13 bills have emerged in the USA this year targeting this application. The “cloud of uncertainty” has led to a 30% decline in the crumb rubber market over recent years and to job losses, Wiener told the BIR Tyres & Rubber Committee meeting 22 May in Hong Kong.

She warned that this represented “an industrywide issue affecting all recyclers, regardless of commodity,” adding that it was essential to “work together, sharing information and strategies.” Weiner pointed delegates in the direction of the RecycledRubberFacts.org, which carries information on “all the various studies out there that have demonstrated the safety of this material.”

BIR Tyres & Rubber Committee Chairman Barend Ten Bruggencate of Recybem in the Netherlands said Dutch public health and environment institute RIVM and the European chemicals agency ECHA have insisted recently that health risks associated with rubber granulate were “negligible.”

He also highlighted statistics from the European Tyre and Rubber Manufacturers' Association indicating that 95% of the EU 28's used tyres underwent some form of treatment in 2015, including material and energy recovery, whereas only 5%, or 186,000 tonnes, were landfilled.

Qiang Yu, executive chairman of the China National Tyre Recycling Association and president of Tianjin Hi-tech Environmental Development Co. Ltd., Tianjin, China, said that in that country the most recent figures available suggest regenerated rubber production accounts for 36.5% of waste rubber use, while vulcanised rubber powder production and thermal cracking contribute a further 5% and 3.6%, respectively. Tyre retreading consumes 4% and has been “stagnant” in China over recent years.

He also noted that his company had paved more than 4,100 kilometres of highway using tyre-derived crumb rubber modified bitumen.