

BIR CONVENTION: Worlds of opportunity

Despite decades of growth, the plastic recycling sector still watches considerable amounts of plastic scrap head to landfills and incinerators.

[Brian Taylor](#) May 25, 2015

For plastic recyclers, the glass may seem half empty when they consider the tons of plastic scrap that go unrecycled, or it can seem half full when they also consider the opportunities to redirect that same material.

Delegates at the Plastics Committee meeting at the 2015 [Bureau of International Recycling \(BIR\)](#) World Recycling Convention in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), in May heard comments touching on both the challenges and opportunities present in the plastic recycling sector.

Plastics Committee Chairman Surendra Borad of Belgium-based [Gemini Corporation](#) commented that falling oil prices in late 2014 and January 2015 brought down the price of both primary plastic and plastic scrap.

However, Borad said a direct correlation between oil prices and plastic scrap prices has not held up throughout the year. Using LDPE scrap in Europe as his example, Borad said, “When the oil price came down to around \$45 per barrel during mid-March, the plastic scrap price did not come down. On the contrary, it increased to almost the €560 [per ton] level, which is higher than the prices prevailing before the oil prices dropped.”

Regarding current conditions in Europe, Borad said, “Less and less material is available for export due to an increase in local [reprocessing] within Europe. Due to less availability of plastic scrap, prices of plastic scrap may sustain at the current market level.”

How plastic scrap fares in the second half of 2015 will in part rely on the Chinese economy, said Borad, commenting, “When China sneezes, we in Europe get a cold. When China gets a cold, we get a fever, and when China has a fever we get pneumonia.”

Fellow committee member Steve Wong of Hong Kong-based [Fukutomi Company Ltd.](#), said the Green Fence in China may get even higher for plastics recyclers, as China’s customs agency and environment ministry will soon require an environmental “assessment” of all inbound shipments registered as plastic scrap. Wong said the new procedure is expected to be put in place during the second half of 2015.

Wong said the demand for plastic scrap in China nonetheless remains strong, with manufacturers of agricultural film in particular consuming LDPE and HDPE scrap. This agricultural film also is increasingly collected for recycling after it is used, said Wong.

Guest presenters Mahmoud Al Sharif Jr. of UAE-based [Sharif Metals International](#) and Katharina Goeschl of UAE-based [Emirates Environmental Technology](#) provided overviews on plastic recycling conditions in the host region.

Sharif said governments in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region are investing heavily in plastics production, with Abu Dhabi building a Polymers Park and Saudi Arabia constructing 14 industrial cities, many of which will have primary plastics production plants. Saudi Arabia “aims to be a global top 10 exporter” of plastic materials, said Sharif.

Sharif said there are currently some products, such as outdoor furniture and insulation, being made from plastic scrap in the GCC region, but “much of what is collected is exported to China.”

Collection of plastic scrap in many GCC nations is still in the early development stages, but a lot is generated, said Sharif. “Tremendous tonnage is produced in different forms every year,” he stated.

Goeschl said the UAE alone generates enough municipal solid waste (MSW) each year to fill 550,000 shipping containers, and some 21 percent of it is plastic. Both in practice and by mentality, the vast majority of this material heads to affordable (no cost, in many cases) landfills.

Tied into its [Vision 2021](#) plan, the UAE has set a goal of diverting 75 percent of its MSW, with a revised target date of 2030. The government has determined “that recycling should be prioritized,” but the details as to what combination of recycling plants and waste-to-energy facilities will be built are not final.

The 2015 BIR World Recycling Convention was May 17-20 at the InterContinental Festival City in Dubai.