

Textiles

France aims to double sorting volumes

Discussion of some familiar issues awaited delegates to the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Monte-Carlo, including the proposed eco-levy in France, the 'end-of-waste' debate and the pressure applied to the textiles recycling sector by higher buying-in and fuel costs. At the same time, there was news of a fresh recycling-related initiative in the Netherlands.

Contributions to France's controversial eco-levy on new clothes and shoes are likely to begin before the end of this year, it was revealed in Monte-Carlo by Bertrand Paillat, Director General of the French Chamber of Commerce.

Distributors and other companies responsible for putting new clothing and shoes on the market would be making these contributions with some reluctance but recognised the legal imperative of so doing, he told delegates to the BIR Textiles Division meeting. The objective now was to ensure that the money raised was not 'ill-spent' and that operation of the levy system did not lead to 'unfair competition'. An annual audit would be undertaken, he added, to ensure that the system was not running contrary to competition rules.

These words would have been of particular interest to the significant number of textile recyclers in Europe who believe that the new levy will disrupt the textiles recycling market to the disadvantage of established commercial enterprises.

Sorting target

According to Mr Paillat, the key objective of the levy approach was to more than double sorted volumes in France over a six-year period - from 61 000 tonnes in 2005 to 130 000 tonnes by 2011. Collection in France would be required to increase at a similar rate to meet this target, it was suggested. He expected the industry to achieve this goal rather than 'run the risk' of the levy becoming a tax.

The introduction of the eco-levy would enable textiles collections to be extended 'across the whole French territory' and would also support research efforts into, for example, 'the best outlets for these textiles', he added.

The French initiative has sparked significant interest in other countries. For example, Terry Ralph of the Textile Recycling Association (TRA) confirmed that discussions on this subject had already been held with the UK's environment department. Mr Ralph also acknowledged TRA's continuing work with the Campaign for Real Recycling in the UK which aims to support source-segregated over co-mingled collections.



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He insisted: 'Any textiles collected along with other wastes in the same container cannot be effectively recycled.'

'Cradle-to-cradle' concept

Details of another textiles-related initiative - this time in the Netherlands - were outlined by Hans Brak of Veriniging Herwinning Textiel. The Jeans for Jeans, or J4J, project was focusing on the 'cradle-to-cradle' concept of turning post-consumer clothing into new clothes. Members had discovered that the production of jeans and other clothing from 100% recycled textiles could lead to 'enormous' energy savings of 53%, as well as to a reduction in water and chemical consumption of, respectively, 99% and 88%, he said.

The BIR Textiles Division meeting in Monte-Carlo also featured brief market summaries. President Olaf Rintsch of Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus GmbH in Germany pointed to generally 'positive' conditions although he added that 20% price increases for originals had been offset by higher fuel and buying-in costs. At the same time, sales of used clothing into Africa and Pakistan had been adversely affected by a reduction in customers'

purchasing power and by clients becoming more selective in their product requirements. Prices of wipers had increased by up to 15%, according to Mr Rintsch, whereas the bed feathers market was 'not so good'.

Textiles on 'indicative list'

Turning to legislative matters, Dr Andreas Jaron from the German Ministry of the Environment told delegates: 'We need to find a quick and easy way to define end-of-waste for textiles.' In response, BIR's Environmental & Technical Director Ross Bartley confirmed that textiles appeared on the 'indicative list' of recyclables to be considered at EU level in the context of when a waste ceases to be a waste.

According to the division's General Delegate Alexander Glaser of Fachverband Textiel-Recycling eV, collected used clothing should not be considered as a waste because the public placed items in special containers in the knowledge that this act represented 'a donation' and would 'benefit someone'. If people were indifferent to the destination of their used clothing, they would consign it to the refuse bin rather than take it to a collection point, he argued. □



Mehdi Zerroug of Framinex in France (left) and Textiles Division President Olaf Rintsch of Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus in Germany.



Terry Ralph of the UK Textile Recycling Association.