

Materials Focus BIR 2017 conference report

BY CARRIE BONE
Researcher

Concern over the impending de facto ban by China on the import of a range of secondary materials, including mixed papers and plastics, was raised during several sessions of the latest Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) convention, held in India.

Robin Wiener, president of the influential US trade group the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI), told the International Environment Council that China's actions had the potential to affect \$6.5bn (£4.95bn)-worth of annual exports from the US and 150,000 related jobs in America.

Some US municipalities had stopped accepting papers and plastics in their kerbside collections, which Wiener said had been "a big force for us in raising this issue with the US government", leading to meetings at the White House and in Congress.

Wiener added that self-sufficiency in scrap was "an important driver" for the Chinese government, and the proposed 0.3% contamination level – if sustained – constituted an effective ban because "no-one thinks they can meet that threshold".

Although this is a view that various UK companies also share, ISRI has been the leading voice against the ban, raising concerns to relevant government departments and seeking support for further clarification from Beijing about the materials affected. ISRI has previously stated that, although it supports the efforts of the Chinese to clean up their environment, it wants greater clarity in the terminology that China uses to



describe materials it defines as waste and high-value scrap commodities.

Secretary general of the European Recycling Industries' Confederation, Emmanuel Katrakis, said his organisation had been gathering information from members about the effects of China's policy so that the European Commission can be armed with hard data when mounting its case.

Plastics committee chairman Surendra Borad Patrawari of Gemini Corporation said the plastics recycling industry had become "insanely dependent" on China, and its import restrictions left suppliers in other parts of the world not so much with a cold but rather with "pneumonia". China and Hong Kong imported 9.2 million tonnes of plastics scrap in 2016 but this figure is likely to nosedive next year, he warned.

Dr Steve Wong, executive president of the China Scrap Plastics Association, said in a report that officials in China had confirmed that plastic scrap import licences will be issued for 2018 only for factories with clean records and full compliance with environmental regulations. As a result, imports into China could fall to 30-40% of current levels next year, leaving overseas suppliers

BIR panel: (from left) Emmanuel Katrakis, secretary general of EuRIC; Arnaud Brunet, BIR director general; Robin Wiener; Ranjit Baxi; Michael Lion of Everwell Resources, Hong Kong, and chairman of the BIR International Trade Council; and Ross Bartley, BIR director for environment and trade

to find alternative outlets for several million tonnes of scrap plastics.

The value of certain materials had fallen to below zero in some markets, while plastic scrap prices within China had risen by 20-30% due to shortages, Wong said. The situation had prompted scrap processing capacities to be moved to other countries in the region such as Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Wong told the committee he expected the policy would help to boost China's domestic recycling rate from the current low level of 22%. He anticipated China's PET collection volumes would climb from 3.1million tonnes in 2015 to 4.1million tonnes in 2018.

Mixed papers is one of the grades included in China's proposed import restrictions. BIR president Ranjit Singh Baxi of J&H Sales International told the paper committee that the market was predicting a 30% reduction in recovered paper volumes going to China. But, until the 0.3% contamination level had been formalised, the industry would continue to abide by the internationally accepted threshold of 1.5% non-paper components.

Baxi called the 0.3% threshold un-

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