



Plastic Division

Mixed start to 2002 for plastics recyclers

The problem of sourcing appropriate raw material - notably in Italy - provided one of the main topics at the BIR Plastics Committee meeting. Delegates also heard the usual round of national and regional market updates.



Plastics Committee Chairman Peter Daalder of Daly Plastics, The Netherlands.



Barend ten Bruggencate, the Dutch Chairman of the BIR Tyres Committee.

Contrasting market reports were delivered to the BIR Plastics Committee meeting in Monte-Carlo. Jacques Musa of France, for example, was largely upbeat in describing conditions in his domestic market, suggesting that PE and PP have been enjoying reasonably good market conditions while polystyrene (PS) raw material prices have risen by as much as 40% since the beginning of the year. Secondary plastics prices have been on a rising trend but 'not quite in line with virgin prices', he said.

However, a more sombre picture was painted by Plastics Committee Chairman Peter Daalder of The Netherlands in his international market review. A poor end to 2001 had been followed by slow buying patterns in early 2002 and, despite a revival following Chinese New Year, late April had witnessed a fall-off in activity levels.

The Asian market report from Jean-Michel Cauche of Belgium spoke of low prices but suggested technical qualities such as PMMA, ABS, glass fibre and flame retardants have been enjoying healthy demand. The growing popularity of DVDs has created a problem, he noted, in that these products are made from a different polycarbonate to CDs. For injectors, this increased the risk of contamination and so the material has become quite difficult to sell.

Guest speaker at the Plastics Committee meeting was Fabrizio Debernardi, Director General of LPR 2000 srl, Italy. His company produces PP and LDPE for sale to injection moulders manufacturing fruit and chicken boxes as well as

flowerpots. According to Mr Debernardi, these end products are of relatively low value and so LPR 2000 'needs to find scrap at a very low price, otherwise it would be impossible for us to sell our material'. At the moment, however, his company's buying prices are increasing and margins are therefore coming under ever more intense pressure.

As a partial solution, LPR 2000 has looked to buy lower-quality, cheaper raw material such as PP ad-

hesive tape, painted bumpers or multi-layer PE/PP/PA/PET film. The company has also increased its purchases outside of Italy because 'it is practically impossible to find the scrap' on the domestic market. Indeed, subsequent discussions confirmed a 'major shortage' of raw materials in Italy, with processors operating at only around 65-70% of capacity. □

Tyre landfilling ban may create 'enormous' problems

The Tyres Committee meeting featured a guest presentation outlining the wider EU waste management policy framework into which the used tyre sector must fit. Also discussed were problems likely to arise as a result of a forthcoming EU ban on the landfilling of whole tyres.

'Recycling businesses will always be faced with legislation. It is no use muttering against legislation. Sooner or later you will lose this battle.' That was the stark warning delivered to the Tyres Committee meeting in Monte-Carlo by Dr Kees Wielenga of the Ffact consultancy in Belgium, which specialises in the implementation and monitoring of sustainable waste management strategies.

Noting that the EU's 6th Environmental Action Programme is establishing the agenda for the next decade, Dr Wielenga said the emphasis must fall on environmental benefit rather than on recycling for its own sake, although there will also be development of 'an economic and legal framework to promote recycling'.

The guest speaker also underlined the potentially huge impact of 13 new countries joining the European Union. In the main, the candidate nations are currently lagging behind the 15 existing EU member states in terms of implementation of recycling strategies and wider environmental policies. An expanded EU may lead to 'tensions' and therefore may not enjoy completely free movement of all recyclables as some countries look to introduce their own controls, he said.

In his review of market development, the Tyres Committee Chairman Barend Ten Bruggencate warned of the 'enormous problems' likely to confront a number of EU countries - notably the U.K., Ireland, Spain, Italy and Greece - once new restrictions ban the landfilling of whole tyres by July next year.

Taking the U.K. as an example, Mr Ten Bruggencate noted that around 30% of the 400 000 tonnes of used tyres arising each year are destined for landfill. Although the U.K. government is considering compulsory measures if satisfactory voluntary agreements are not reached on dealing with used tyres, it is feared that fly-tipping of used tyres could increase as the landfill ban began to take effect.

By Ian Martin