

## Textiles

# Efforts to develop new markets should be 'redoubled'

The traditional whistle-stop tour of world markets conducted during the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Paris generated a long list of varied complaints – from unfair competition and undeveloped market outlets, to tumbling used clothing values and payment problems. On a more positive note, delegates were informed of a number of initiatives designed to boost shoe recycling.

It had been a major conclusion of the International Textile Recycling Summit held during the BIR World Convention in June this year. And the same theme re-emerged strongly at the late-October meeting of the BIR Textiles Division in Paris: namely, the need to develop new market outlets, particularly for those used textiles with a low or even negative value.

Mehdi Zerroug of Framimex in France began his first meeting as divisional president with the comment: 'It is natural that most R&D investments until now have been focused on improving and optimising sorting and grading for reuse. But outlets for the 40-50% of residuals with negative or low values have been limited. Our industry therefore needs to redouble its efforts to facilitate the emergence of new markets for these grades.' To this end, he

added, BIR wants to participate in the development of an 'observatory' of best practice in used textiles recycling and of current R&D projects.

Guest speaker Andrew Gilbert, key account manager at UK resource efficiency organisation WRAP, also identified the finding of viable markets for lower-grade textiles as one of two major priorities for the sector, the other being the raising of awareness of the need to prevent textiles going to landfill.

## 'A new reality'

Of the several market reports delivered in Paris, the most dramatic was from Alan Wheeler of the UK's Textile Recycling Association. The value of UK used clothing has fallen 'around 40%' over the last 12 months and is likely to drop even further as trading conditions worsen and importers 'tighten their belts' by applying downward pressure on traditionally more expensive items, such as those coming from the UK. The pound's strength in relation to the Euro has heightened the competi-

tive pressure on UK exporters, he also observed.

'The UK used clothing industry is in a new reality, and British charities and local authorities need to accept that the good times are over for now,' Wheeler said. 'The time is now right for local authorities to change their priorities and put more emphasis on awarding agreements to those collectors who can deliver higher collection rates. Income should not be the primary consideration.'

## 'Pushed off the market'

In identifying key developments for Italy's used textiles sector, Sauro Balcerini noted a slowing of demand and payments from customers in Africa. And in a couple of submitted reports, Osamu Shoji of Shoji & Co. Ltd in Japan pointed to the lack of any profit from grading original rags while Eric Stubin of Trans-Americas Textile Recycling in

the USA estimated that overall pricing of US originals 'may be off by as much as 30% from all-time highs'.

In the textiles recycling sector in Germany, private services are being 'pushed off the market', complained Michael Sigloch of Gras & Sigloch GmbH & Co. He added that fair competition with public concerns is 'impossible under these conditions' and that amendment is required of laws relating to Germany's circular economy act. Meanwhile, the Belgian report submitted by Pol T'Jollyn of NV Recutex noted: 'Collectors face a problem of unfair competition from the social economy.' Also in Paris, Zerroug's opening address as president concluded with confirmation that his immediate predecessor - Olaf Rintsch of Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus GmbH in Germany - is to be appointed an honorary president of the BIR Textiles Division. □

## Treading new ground with shoe recycling

The 'huge' but largely untapped potential for collecting and recycling end-of-life shoes was spotlighted at the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Paris by guest speaker Mathieu Hestin, project manager at BIO Intelligence Service in France. The collection rate for shoes in France is currently an 'extremely low' 3% and yet the raw material value available for recovery exceeds Euro 250 million. The speaker went on to review various initiatives in this field, including: a project

set up by leading brand Nike to recycle sports shoes into material for use in sports pitches and underlay; and the closed-loop recycling of mono-material shoes. In the case of the latter, he noted that Okabashi and Crocs have established take-back systems for subsequent grinding down of their footwear and incorporation into new products at rates of up to 25%.



Mehdi Zerroug: Outlets for the residuals have been limited.



Alan Wheeler: the good times are over for now.



Mathieu Hestin: shoe collection rates low.