

BIR Convention: Mixed messages about electronic scrap recycling

E-Scrap meeting presenters say the industry needs to set the record straight.

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- RTGE Staff

The e-scrap recycling sector is the victim of “a messaging issue” and of the general circulation of mixed and inconsistent information that has unfairly tarnished its image, according to speakers at the [Bureau of International Recycling's](#) (BIR) recent E-Scrap Committee Meeting, held as part of the association's annual fall gathering. The BIR World Recycling Convention took place 25-27 October in Prague.

During the E-Scrap meeting, committee member Robin Wiener, president of the U.S.-based [Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries](#) (ISRI), told attendees that the committee had been discussing the need not only to set the record straight but also possible means of achieving this goal.

Committee Chairman Thomas Papageorgiou of Anamet Recycling Industry SA in Greece confirmed that further news on this matter would be issued in due course.

Eric Harris, ISRI associate counsel/director of government and international affairs, described the promotion of “good data” over misinformation as “one of the biggest challenges we have.”

In a question-and-answer meeting moderated by Martijn Reintjes, chief editor of trade magazine *Recycling International*, contributors argued that several recent reports—including from some well-respected bodies—contained damaging inaccuracies, most notably with regard to the volumes of e-waste reportedly “dumped” in India and parts of Africa.

BIR Trade and Environment Director Ross Bartley confirmed that the world body had already challenged a number of inaccurate reports on e-scrap at the highest levels. After a question on e-waste and e-scrap, he replied that the UN-EP Basel Convention had published its guidance on electrical and electronic waste and used equipment—in particular regarding the distinction between waste and nonwaste—and concluded that BIR was bound to advise its members on applicable laws.

Specifically in relation to claims of large-scale dumping in India, E-Scrap Committee member Surendra Patawari Borad of Netherlands-based Gemini Corp. NV said such reports were not based on fact, adding, “Import into India is a very difficult process.” The country's e-scrap market was largely domestic in nature as imports were not allowed and exports were extremely restricted, he said.

In other market reports, executive president of the China Scrap Plastics Association, Steve Wong of Hong Kong's Fukutomi Co. Ltd. spoke of a complicated situation in his home country, with recyclers suffering under a heavy cost and regulatory burden. At the same time, China was becoming less competitive in relation to some other countries in the region.

In the United States, some e-scrap recyclers were so desperate for supply that they are overpaying for their material,” contended Harris. An increasing number of companies were looking to develop their business through diversification into new service areas such as data security and through maximization of reuse, refurbishment and remanufacturing.

A similar trend toward service provision could be observed in Europe, according to Papageorgiou. He emphasised the changing face of e-scrap and most notably the shift from metals towards the use of other materials in electronic devices.

“We have to consider all the issues and turn to innovation in order to achieve sustainability for our businesses,” said Papageorgiou, referring to a recent study from the steel industry which indicates that the administrative burden on the e-scrap industry has to be carefully evaluated in financial terms so that the sustainability of the sector is not threatened and allocation of resources through extended producer responsibility schemes or other means is more transparent.