



Textiles Division calls for Chinese co-operation

By Ian Martin

The European textiles recycling sector is still struggling to contend with the competition from relatively cheap new clothing and shoes from China.



China has developed an almost insatiable appetite for almost all secondary raw materials - with textiles emerging as one of the most notable exceptions. At the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Beijing, the Asian giant was urged to look anew at the possibility of accepting imports of sorted and unsorted second-hand clothing.

Despite an improvement in demand since last autumn's BIR Convention in Milan, the European textiles recycling sector was still struggling to contend with the competition provided by relatively cheap new clothing and shoes from China. In the face of this 'flood', prices of secondary materials had been pushed downwards and many sorting operations had been forced into bankruptcy, BIR Textiles Division President Frithjof W. Schepke of Germany-based Schepke Konzepte explained to delegates in Beijing. At the same time, China had not taken responsibility for the return of any of these goods, he noted.

The speaker duly called for a continuing improvement in the quality of Chinese textiles and for the return - 'without protectionist measures' - of used textiles. It was important, he added, that the Chinese market opened up 'for our sorted and unsorted second-hand clothing exports'.

Resource conservation

China should give fresh consideration to textiles recycling given its potential for benefiting resource conservation, suggested Rainer Binger of FWS GmbH & Co. KG in Germany. Having noted that expansion

of China's textiles manufacturing sector was leading to increased consumption of both water and energy, Mr Binger told delegates: 'China will have to look at textiles recycling and fibre recovery for the manufacture of new clothing if it wishes to maintain its prime position in global trade. We are prepared to help you and to help generate this market in China.'

A somewhat contentious report on the UK market was submitted by Terry Ralph of Terimpex Ltd. He claimed that 'vast' volumes of goods picked up by 'legal and illegal' collectors were being sold directly - and unsorted - to new EU countries and other Baltic states. 'This is taking goods from the British markets, thus further reducing the quantities sorted in the UK,' he said. 'The obvious effect of this unprecedented demand is to force the price of the raw materials purchased from charities to even higher levels. Sorters are finding that any profit margin they may have previously enjoyed has been completely eroded during the past few months.' Those companies with heavy commitments to plant and production in the UK were seeing their raw material costs 'inflated to unworkable levels by virtual one-man operations with few overheads,

turning over material without any sorting at all'.

Drastic slow-down

According to market indications, Africa was no longer able to absorb further price increases. 'Recently, there seems to have been a drastic slow-down in the amount of material needed by some East African countries,' noted Mr Ralph.

The speaker went on to report that the UK's Textile Recycling Association (TRA) was participating in a government-funded research project covering the recycling of low-grade waste. The TRA believed that, in order for the second-hand clothing trade to make progress, it would 'need the support of the local, national, European and international governments', he commented.

Gunther Krippendorf of FWS/Alta West reported relatively stable conditions within the German market. Demand for sorted used clothing was 'satisfactory, especially when compared to two years ago', although collectors and sorters were not well-placed to sustain further cost increases. 'Sorters can't get higher prices because purchasers' margins don't allow it,' he told delegates. Meanwhile, German textile recyclers were witnessing stable demand for wiping cloths, with reasonably strong orders coming from Eastern Europe. Bed feathers were also attracting 'good demand at relatively good prices'.

According to a report from Klaus Löwer of Germany-based Hans Löwer Recycling GmbH, prices had tended to go lower in the USA while wiping cloth prices in Japan had also declined despite an increase in demand. The BIR Textiles Division Honorary President went on to call for research into potential new outlets for used textiles - for example, as combustibles in cement plants. 'Textiles are simply too valuable to end up in landfills,' he insisted. □



Rainer Binger of FWS GmbH & Co., Germany.



BIR Textiles Division President Frithjof W. Schepke