

Transboundary movements of new Basel Convention listings now controlled

There are “major implications” for the recycling industry following the recent decision to list non-hazardous plastic waste that is not recyclable or is difficult to recycle under Annex II of the Basel Convention, it was confirmed to the BIR Plastics Committee meeting in Singapore on May 22.

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Once the changes to the listings take effect on January 1 2021, transboundary movements – particularly shipments involving non-OECD countries – will be subject to prior informed consent controls and prohibitions, it was explained by BIR Trade & Environment Director Ross Bartley, who had spent two weeks at the latest Basel Convention meetings in Geneva representing the interests of the recycling industry.

According to BIR prior informed consent is “normally a slow process” and some smaller countries may struggle to put consent agreements in place. As a result, warned Mr Bartley, the new listings are likely to mean a significant overall reduction in transboundary movements of the plastics concerned.

BIR has already pledged its support to the Basel Convention’s new Plastic Waste Partnership which will aim to assist in environmentally sound management. In Singapore, Mr Bartley urged large businesses with an interest in plastics recycling to involve themselves in the Partnership to ensure industry views are fully represented.

The BIR Plastics Committee meeting in Singapore was hosted for the first time by its new Chairman – Henk Alssema, Chairman of Vita Plastics in the Netherlands. He acknowledged that the plastics recycling industry is experiencing “a lot of growing pains” amid the current transition from a linear to a circular economy. There is now a need, he added, to find “a common approach” and to “build new value chains”.

China’s import policy shift has prompted many recyclers to move to other countries, notably in South East Asia. However, several of these nations are now introducing tighter measures to control incoming volumes, according to the China Scrap Plastics Association’s Executive President Dr Steve Wong. He pointed in particular to strict inspections now undertaken in Malaysia and Thailand.

The import changes in China have “greatly reduced” opportunities for US exports of the lower grades of plastic whereas new outlets have been emerging in Asia for the higher grades of LDPE and HDPE, revealed Sally Houghton of the Plastics Recycling Corporation of California. The domestic market in the USA is “much healthier”, she added, with PET boosted in California by the prospect of mandated recycled contents.

For Europe, meanwhile, Clement Lefebvre of Veolia Propreté France Recycling identified an upturn in interest in the chemical recycling of plastics.

During the meeting in Singapore, Mr Alssema identified a trend towards major brands introducing more recycled content into their plastics packaging. In this same context, guest speaker Aurore Belhoste provided delegates with an outline of the actions taken at Unilever towards achieving its goal of deriving 25% of its plastic packaging from post-consumer resins by the year 2025. According to the company’s Procurement Manager – Rigid Plastic SEAA, some of its products are already in packaging with a 100% recycled content “and the aim is to extend this to more brands”.

Source: BIR