

PRESS RELEASE

Recent BIR World Recycling Convention in Munich (24-25 October 2011)

Plastics Committee: WEEE focus at Plastics Round-Table

Brussels, 31 October 2011

The spotlight was turned on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) at the BIR Plastics Round-Table in Munich as two guest speakers approached the issue from very different angles.

Dr Rainer Koehnlechner, owner and Managing Director of separation specialist Hamos GmbH of Germany, explained that it was possible to derive high-purity polymers from mixed WEEE plastics. Using, for example, sink/float technology incorporating a special salt solution suitable for subsequent electrostatic separation, the company has been able to separate out ABS, polypropylene and polystyrene at purity levels of more than 98.5%. There are no flame retardants in these end products, the speaker emphasised.

The company's Wersag facility near Dresden has been achieving production rates of more than 2 tonnes per hour, he added.

The other guest speaker in Munich was Tilman Baehr from the Hamburg Ministry of Urban Development and Environment in Germany. He identified brominated flame retardants as a problem component of WEEE-derived plastics scrap, adding that no binding thresholds had been set for them.

Having confirmed that the revision of the EU's WEEE Directive was "close to the finishing line" after reaching the second reading stage in the European Parliament, Mr Baehr suggested that better sorting of the waste at the point of origin would lead to fewer restrictions down the line.

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In a brief round of market reports, Gregory Cardot of Veolia Propreté in France noted a slight drop-off in activity levels since mid-October within his domestic secondary plastics market. In China, meanwhile, there had been significant problems at ports and the market was “under pressure”, he said.

BIR Plastics Committee Chairman Surendra Borad of Gemini Corporation NV in Belgium used that same two-word phrase - “under pressure” - to describe prices in the USA. As for the market in India, he said, this was “absolutely dormant” as many company licences to import plastics scrap had not been renewed. India’s domestic recycling industry, on the other hand, “is doing extremely well” and is claimed to have achieved a recycling rate of 47%, he added.

Although the overall economic outlook was not too positive at present, Mr Borad predicted “a golden future” for the rapidly-expanding recycling sector. In an extrapolation of available data, he arrived at the conclusion that the global recycling industry is worth upwards of US\$ 500bn per annum and employs as many as 20m people around the world. The industry “is growing at a tremendous rate that is faster than (world) GDP”, he said.

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