

PRESS RELEASE

Recent BIR World Recycling Convention & Exhibition in Shanghai (27-29 May 2013)

Textiles Division: Pressure mounts as prices of originals reach “a zenith”

Brussels, 5 June 2013

The very survival of textiles recyclers in various parts of the world was the focus of discussion at the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Shanghai on May 29.

For the UK, Alan Wheeler of the Textile Recycling Association revealed that more than 10% of his organisation's membership had ceased trading in the last year or so because some textiles collectors “could not afford to continue paying the prevailing market prices” for originals. And he added: “I suspect that there are more to come.”

Mr Wheeler, who was introduced as the Textiles Division's new General Delegate at the meeting, also noted that used textiles were now “routinely targeted by criminal gangs”. In France too, collection containers were continuing to “disappear overnight” and some thefts were taking place even during the collection process, reported divisional Vice President Mehdi Zerroug of Framimex. Productivity of collection containers in France had dropped 15% between 2011 and 2012, he went on to note.

For Germany, re-elected BIR Textiles Division President Olaf Rintsch of Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus GmbH warned how difficult market conditions and unfair competition were adversely impacting the traditional used textiles industry. Prices of originals had reached “a zenith” and sorters were finding it “almost impossible” to make profits. He continued: “We have been here through the good and the bad days, so we ought to be given the space to survive rather than allow the destruction of a branch that has been around for 200 years.” If the industry's survival continued to be threatened by its inability to obtain originals at reasonable prices, then a “huge” number of jobs would be lost and “taxpayers will have to pay”.

Beyond Europe, the Textiles Division's Honorary President Klaus Löwer of Germany-based Hans Löwer Recycling GmbH spoke of margins being subject to “major pressure” in North America, with some business closures anticipated in Canada. And in Japan, prices for collected textiles had increased by 100% while volumes had declined by 20%.

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A perspective on the market in China was provided by guest speaker Lin Shidong, Secretary General of the China Chain Store and Franchise Association (CCFA) Recycled Fibre Commission. In China, more used clothes were being discarded in line with the general improvement in living standards, he maintained. Although a significant volume was being collected and channelled into a variety of applications, such as anti-vibration materials, education and strong policy leadership were required to achieve a potential reuse level of close to 60%. There was also a need to upgrade technologies to boost recycling, he added.

The speaker confirmed that China exports some sorted used clothing but that the majority of the collected material is reused domestically.

Mr Löwer welcomed this report on textiles recycling developments in China and envisaged scope for a closer collaboration between the country and BIR.

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