

PRESS RELEASE

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

International Environment Council: Recycling benefits from Basel “miracle”

Brussels, 02 November 2011

The Basel Convention's 10th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Colombia has signalled “a true paradigm shift” in the status of recycling, the BIR's International Environment Council (IEC) was told in Munich on October 25th.

Staged in the week prior to the BIR meeting, the Basel Convention COP was already being hailed as “the miracle of Cartagena” because of its “spectacular success” on a number of fronts, it was noted in Munich by the UN-EP Basel Convention's Executive Secretary Dr Katharina Kummer Peiry.

The overall political message from Colombia was that waste should be minimised and treated “as a valuable resource and not as a costly burden”, she said. The acknowledgement that recycling can be highly beneficial if conducted in a socially and environmentally sound manner meant that the Basel Convention was no longer focused solely on controlling and inhibiting waste transactions. This represented “a significant change in attitude by governments”, according to the speaker.

Having described e-waste as the stream “most discussed by far” at Basel Convention level, Dr Kummer Peiry said that the Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment (PACE), launched at the 9th COP, had become “a key platform” for work on the management of used equipment of this nature, with involvement from governments, industry associations and companies. The ultimate aim, she said, was to devise practical guidelines taking industry input and expertise into account.

BIR – REPRESENTING THE FUTURE LEADING RAW MATERIAL SUPPLIERS

The agreement on how many and which countries are needed to ratify the ban amendment on export of hazardous waste to developing countries for it to take effect was also part of the success of the COP in Colombia. Seventeen countries that were present at the 1995 COP that have not yet ratified the ban would need to do so for it to become part of the Basel Convention. It was speculated that this could take some three to five years.

Olivier François, Chairman of the IEC, and Robin Wiener, President of the US Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI), asked about the certification of recycling companies to demonstrate they are environmentally soundly managed, and pointed to a number of existing certification systems. In reply, Dr Kummer Peiry explained that certification of recycling companies was part of the Environmentally Sound Management (ESM) approach, and assured them that existing certification systems would need to be recognised in that work.

The other guest speaker in Munich was no stranger to IEC meetings. Former IEC Chairman Dr Alvaro Rodriguez de Sanabria, radioactivity expert for Spain's recovery and recycling federation FER, outlined work towards an International Atomic Energy Agency "Code of Conduct for Scrap and Semis Trading". This would be a non-binding document aimed at: protecting people, property and the environment against ionising radiation arising from radioactive material that may inadvertently be present in scrap and semis; and harmonising the approach of states to the discovery and safe handling of such material, especially as scrap moves across borders.

It was "nonsense", he argued, to apply the "finder pays" principle in situations where metals recyclers uncover a radioactive orphan source in an incoming scrap consignment. It was not the fault of a recycler if control of such a source had been lost further up the chain, he said.

According to the speaker, the BIR had demonstrated its willingness to co-operate fully in arriving at the best possible solution to such incidents. Furthermore, to companies all around the world the BIR had freely distributed educational posters in over 10 languages giving advice on the visual identification and detection of unwanted radioactive material.

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