

BIR is the international trade association of the recycling industries. Around 70 countries are represented through their national trade associations and individual companies which are involved in recycling. BIR comprises four commodity divisions: iron and steel, non ferrous metals, paper and textiles, and has committees dealing with stainless steel and special alloys, plastics and rubber. BIR's primary goals are to promote recycling and recyclability, thereby conserving natural resources, protecting the environment and facilitating free trade of secondary raw materials.

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International Environment Council: ***'End of waste' in sight***

The recycling industry must remain united as it nears its long-held goal of extricating its end-products, i.e. materials ready for melting or re-pulping, from waste legislation, delegates to the BIR's International Environment Council (IEC) meeting in Amsterdam were urged by its Chairman, Olivier François of Galloometal in Belgium.

Currently under discussion, criteria for establishing the "end of waste" will bring welcome harmonisation and legal certainty for the entire EU recycling industry, while at the same time reducing its administrative burden, Mr François explained. It is "very important", therefore, for recyclers to support the final push towards defining the "end of waste" for the various recyclables, he said. "We really must keep this target in mind. We need to be strong and we need to be strong together."

Further developments on end-of-waste criteria for iron scrap and aluminium scrap are anticipated before the end of this year, he added.

Earlier, BIR's Environmental & Technical Director Ross Bartley confirmed that the OECD is advancing with its work on Sustainable Materials Management (SMM), with case studies developed on aluminium, plastics and wood fibres, among other materials. In shifting from "end-of-life" thinking towards a more integrated life-cycle approach, SMM is intended to ensure that material resources are managed sustainably and used efficiently throughout their life-cycle to help promote economic growth, environmental quality and sustainable development.

While SMM should be "good for recycling", Mr Bartley expressed concern at "elements of protectionism" contained within the related documentation.

Mr Bartley also invited BIR recycling companies to consider participating in PACE, the Basel Convention's Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment. Established in January 2009, this brings together personal computer manufacturers, refurbishers, recyclers, international organisations, academia, environmental groups and governments in a bid to improve the management of used and end-of-life computing equipment. Its project groups will cover: environmentally sound management criteria; refurbishment and repair; material recycling and recovery; and awareness-raising and training.

Two guest speakers addressed the IEC meeting in Amsterdam. The first, Frans Bijlhouwer of Quality Consultants in the Netherlands, spoke of the growing importance of quality management systems such as ISO 9001 in the recycling industry. Suppliers, customers and government agencies - including China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) - are increasingly asking for certification of this kind; therefore, companies going down this route are improving their competitive position both in domestic and world markets, he explained. In addition, adoption of a quality management system serves to improve business performance and to boost confidence in a company. Furthermore, it could assist in the meeting of EU "end-of-waste" criteria.

Delegates also heard from Manuel Villena of LoadIt, a Dutch venture with a vision of creating "paperless administration" of scrap shipments using information technology. Already approved in the Netherlands, the system has saved a sample Dutch company approximately 260 man hours in a single month. The speaker expressed the hope that the system will be piloted in other EU countries.

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