
PRESS RELEASE

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2008 World Recycling Convention & BIR's 60th Anniversary Celebration Monte Carlo, 2-4 June 2008

General Assembly: Acknowledgement of environmental contribution of recycling industry

The enormous environmental contribution of the recycling industry - not least in saving carbon dioxide emissions - was underlined by a stellar array of guest speakers at the 2008 Spring Convention of the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR). The event was attended by an all-time high of more than 1300 delegates on the occasion of the world body's 60th birthday.

At the BIR General Assembly held at Monte-Carlo's Fairmont Hotel on June 3, keynote speaker Lord Nicholas Stern of Brentford outlined the dangers of greenhouse gas emissions and declared: "You should be the heroes of this story." The 500 million tonnes-plus of carbon dioxide equivalent that the recycling industry saved from entering the atmosphere each year had a value of some US\$ 20 billion - "a very significant contribution", declared the author of the world-famous Stern Report on climate change.

Earlier, Lord Stern had explained that, without immediate global action, there was a "50/50 probability" of temperatures ending this century some 5 degC higher than those recorded in the year 1850. This increase in temperature would result in storms, flooding, droughts and raised sea levels which, in turn, would "completely re-draw where you can live", he told the hundreds of delegates present. "It would involve a massive movement of people."

Early worldwide political agreement was required, he argued, to “transform the way we do things”. Energy efficiency could make an immediate positive impact “and that is where recycling is so important”. The implementation of a global carbon trading scheme and a halt to deforestation were also vital components in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, he added.

Lord Stern welcomed BIR’s decision to set up a “Statistical Observatory” to measure and compare its achievements, and also to measure its carbon footprint. This research would generate “some very powerful statements” about the recycling industry’s “enormous” environmental contribution, Lord Stern insisted. And he went on to declare: “You have got a splendid story and I would encourage you very strongly to tell it.”

In addition to the creation of the “Observatory”, BIR World President Dominique Maguin also noted the organisation’s intention to form an International Trade Council which would adopt a “proactive” approach to issues damaging to free trade such as the imposition of duties and import/export bans.

The General Assembly in Monte-Carlo also heard of the commitment to recycling of His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco, who had extended his patronage to the BIR Spring Convention. His representative Robert Calcagno, Minister for Public Works, the Environment and Urban Development, explained that Prince Albert had instituted “dramatic” changes aimed at boosting the principality’s recovery and recycling rate from 6% in 2007 to more than 20%. Paper and glass collections had already leapt 42% and 50% respectively. Mr Calcagno went on to praise the “dynamism” of the recycling industry’s activities.

A similarly upbeat assessment of the recycling industry’s environmental importance was delivered by guest speaker Professor Philippe Chalmin, Chairman of the CycloPé commodity market research institute in France. He described high commodity prices as a “gift from heaven” that would foster greater wisdom in resource utilisation and therefore increased recycling.

On another positive note, outgoing BIR Treasurer Anthony Bird of the UK-based Bird Group of Companies declared that the organisation was now “in the strongest financial position it has ever been in” after “the very best year on record” in 2007. Mr Bird, who has been made a Lifetime Honorary Member of BIR, is to be succeeded as Treasurer by Björn Grufman of M. V. Metallvärden AB of Sweden.

An Honorary Membership was also awarded to Alfred Nijkerk, the only recycler still alive who was present at the creation of BIR in 1948. A metal recycler for many years, Mr Nijkerk has also made a considerable contribution to the promotion of recycling as a trade journalist and freelance writer.

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