



BIR

Bureau of International Recycling

BIR is the international trade association of the recycling industries. More than 55 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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Textiles Division :
Could China offer a solution
to the EU and US secondary textiles merchants?

“We must find a solution as to who is going to pay for our collection, sorting and recycling services,” declared BIR Textiles Division President Frithjof Schepke of Germany-based Schepke Konzepte to the latest Round-Table meeting in Milan. Only 40% of collected material could be worn again while 45% went into the recycling stream and the remaining 15% constituted waste. The sector was therefore left in the “untenable situation” of having to earn sufficient income from the reusable fraction to cover the costs associated with handling the other 60%.

A potentially different approach to this problem was outlined by Alexander Gläser of Fachverband Textil-Recycling eV in Germany. Through its network of collection containers, the textile recycling sector was effectively taking charge of the reuse, recycling or disposal of items that would otherwise become the responsibility of the municipalities. Thus, he argued, the municipalities should be prepared to pay the recycling sector on the basis of the volumes collected and to recoup the costs through a tax on consumers.

In this regard, it had been calculated that German citizens annually disposed of around

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9kg per head of used clothing. A tax of Euro 0.50 per kg would inject valuable funds into the textile recycling sector while costing members of the public an average of only Euro 4.50 per year - "the equivalent of a glass of beer", said Mr Glaser. "Payments would go only to those who sort and recycle. We need to make clear that this will help safeguard jobs."

In contrast to other sectors of the recycling market, survey results had suggested that textiles consumers were unwilling to pay more for a recycled product, observed guest speaker Alessio Bertozzi of Unione Industriale Pratese in Italy. "They are all attracted by fashion - by something that looks new," he declared.

Mr Schepke had earlier maintained that "the survival of the textile recycling industry depends on working together". In this context, Klaus Lower of Hans Lower Recycling GmbH in Germany reviewed latest developments relating to OUVERTES, a seven-country initiative supported by BIR and designed to find solutions to the problems engulfing textile recycling. A valuable dialogue had been created and it would be "a fatal mistake" to let this die, he said.

In recent times, a key issue for Europe's textile recycling industry has been the competition provided by cheap new clothing from China. Terry Ralph of Terimpex Ltd in the UK offered the view: "If the Chinese manufacturers wish to continue global sales of clothing, I am sure they will have to improve their qualities to meet Western standards." China had imposed a ban on imports of second-hand clothing but, said Mr Ralph, it was difficult to understand how such a trade could "damage the burgeoning Eastern market". On behalf of his national federation, he therefore called on BIR officially to question the Chinese authorities on their reasons for implementing the ban as part of a bid to have it lifted.

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