



BIR

Bureau of International Recycling

BIR is the international trade association of the recycling industries. More than 50 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.

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brussels, 28th October 2004

Textiles recycling deserves ‘an acceptable future’

‘The textile recycling industry needs immediate political support, recognition and also worldwide free trade,’ according to a statement prepared by the **BIR Textiles Board** and read out during the **Round-Table meeting in London**.

Noting that ‘the general market value of all recovered textiles has decreased considerably’, the statement insisted that the textiles recycling sector was no longer able to provide its services at no cost to the public. ‘We are looking for discussion with governments, the textile producing and importing industry to create an acceptable future for textiles recycling,’ it declared.

The statement emphasised the environmental benefits delivered by the textiles recycling sector in terms of saving both energy and water. ‘Experts have found out that you need 16,000 litres of water to produce 1kg of cotton,’ it pointed out.

The BIR Textiles Board’s gloomy assessment of business prospects was echoed in the market reports presented to the Round-Table in London, several of which referred to plant closures and companies leaving the sector. **Divisional President Frithjof W. Schepke of Schepke Konzepte** in Germany reported low sales prices, increasing transportation costs, payment difficulties and a ‘hesitant’ market for many of the industry’s goods. ‘Some items remain in stock like lead weights,’ he lamented.

According to Mr Schepke, discussions in Germany had touched on the notion of applying product liability to the textiles sector - ‘but no-one wants to pay for it’. Board member **Michael Sigloch of Fachverband Textil-Recycling eV** in Germany urged politicians to address the possibility of liability of manufacture and to take into consideration the recycling sector’s environmental contribution. ‘We need some kind of subsidy,’ he insisted.

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Reporting for the UK, **Terry Ralph of Terimpex Ltd** described traders as ‘despondent’ and bemoaned the pressure placed on the textiles sector by ‘petty-fogging bureaucracy’. He noted that one large company had closed three sorting plants in the UK and moved operations to other parts of the world where costs were considerably lower. This prompted Mr Schepke to comment: ‘I am not sure that textile recycling has a future along current lines in Europe. Perhaps the only way for us to continue is to relocate to cheap-wage countries where we are not hedged about by red tape or denied access to certain markets.’

Honorary President of the BIR Textiles Division Klaus Löwer of Hans Löwer Recycling GmbH in Germany noted that a working group had been established in the USA to discuss the licensing of sorters and traders. He commented: ‘We could look at doing this in Europe but there needs to be a political will. Everybody wants textiles to be recycled but no action is taken to help us and companies continue to go to the wall.’

The mood of the meeting was lifted by a **guest presentation from Dr Simone Field, Project Manager from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex** in the UK. From her detailed assessment of the Kenyan market, she had understood that the second-hand clothing trade directly or indirectly affected 5 million people in terms of providing jobs or income generation - a ‘substantial’ contribution in a country with 40% unemployment. The trade also allowed very poor people to clothe themselves and their families, and offered increased consumer choice, she added.

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