



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

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Textiles Division:

Ratio of unwearable to wearable clothing unworkable

After more than three years in the post, BIR Textiles Division President Frithjof Schepke of Schepke Konzepte in Germany confessed himself 'fed up' with the bad news engulfing the industry in Europe.

A large number of collection containers had been removed because they were making a loss or were simply 'too expensive to empty', he said. Many companies and charity organisations had chosen to withdraw from the sector because the ratio of unwearable to wearable clothing was unworkable. And yet, Mr Schepke explained, politicians remained hesitant about obliging the clothing industry to contribute towards the recycling and disposal of their products.

Textiles Division Honorary President Klaus Löwer of Hans Löwer Recycling GmbH in Germany argued that textiles recycling 'is no longer a service that can be offered free of charge'. Lamenting a European recycling sector beset by insolvencies, plant closures and payment defaults, he warned that, if the current situation did not change, 'we can pack our bags and turn the lights off'. He urged as a first step the

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adoption of the Japanese system whereby non-marketable textiles were accepted free of charge by landfill operators.

Other reports reinforced the same bleak outlook. If 2003 had been a 'dire' year for the textile recycling sector, then the first five months of 2004 had been 'even more disastrous', according to Alan Wheeler of the UK Textile Recycling Association. Major issues included cash flow problems among African buyers, competition from cheap new clothing of Far Eastern origin, and a 'large excess of materials of all grades on the market'. These difficult conditions were being exacerbated by the 'plague of rogue traders that pick up goods under false pretences and sell to our traditional markets' without 'going to the expense and inconvenience of acquiring waste carriers and waste management licences', said Mr Wheeler.

The report from France spoke of the termination of door-to-door textile collection activities, while the German market was reported to be suffering from the 'increasingly predatory' pricing of new clothing from the Far East. An Australian market report also mentioned the pressure applied by the availability of cheap new clothing from Asia. Survival might ultimately depend on having operations in countries where costs were lower, it suggested.

Guest speaker Dr Andreas Jaron, Head of Division at Germany's Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, declared himself to be 'sceptical' regarding the existence of a political solution to the textile recycling sector's problems. Textiles recycling was deemed to be 'functioning normally' without presenting environmental problems and thus it had not been a focus of political intervention, he pointed out. The speaker also suggested that attempts might be made in the near future to 'remove some of the red tape' surrounding textile recycling operations.

According to BIR's Environmental & Technical Director Ross Bartley, the European Strategy on Waste had provided the world recycling body with an opportunity to put the case for textiles recycling and to highlight difficulties encountered by the sector. However, the absence of significant interest from the European Commission tended to underline that its environmental priorities lay elsewhere.

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