



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

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RED ALERT FOR CATASTROPHIC SITUATION IN SECONDARY TEXTILES SECTOR

The Bureau of International Recycling urges national and European public authorities to acknowledge, address and solve the dramatic situation the secondary textiles sector has been facing in recent years, threatening the survival of hundreds of medium and small enterprises in Europe alone.

At an emergency meeting held on 26th June in the BIR offices in Brussels, representatives of the secondary textiles sector, involving collection, sorting and recycling companies as well as national federations, discussed the deteriorating market conditions in an attempt to salvage a dying industry.

According to Mr Frithjof Schepke, President of the BIR Textiles Division and chairman of the meeting, the work of over 100.000 people employed in the secondary textiles sector is at stake if no immediate action is taken.

Both structural and economic problems have been attacking a sector which, over decades and even centuries, has ensured the environmentally friendly and economically viable recycling and re-use of vast amounts of old clothing.

Until recently, the secondary textiles industry was able to survive because profits from the sale of second hand clothing helped to cross-finance the recycling of poor quality textiles. In collected original material, the percentage of good qualities (that could be sold as second-hand clothing) used to be 60% versus 40% of poor qualities that were recycled or disposed of. Today, this ratio is inversed. Competition from Asian countries, the abolishment of preferential export tariffs for some Eastern European countries and problems

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arising from an ill-conceived waste definition have added to this dismal scenario and lead to virtually disappearing profits.

If no solution was found, millions of tonnes of clothing would end up in landfilling or incineration which would cause additional costs and environmental problems and would not benefit people in need. This would also contradict a recently published EU Commission Communication on a Thematic Strategy on Recycling that favours waste prevention over disposal and encourages more waste processing.

During their one-day meeting, the industry representatives established the following requirements to be fulfilled if the secondary textiles industry should continue its vital task of waste prevention.

- It should be acknowledge that sorted, cleaned and re-usable secondary clothing is not waste.
- A financial aid (depending on the number of employees and on processed volumes) should be granted to grading / sorting companies for the disposal of the unusable clothing,.
- The introduction of a recycling tax or fee on new textiles should be envisaged. According to the principle of producer responsibility, this tax should be paid either by the producer or the importer and would fund a budget that could finance collection, sorting, recovery or disposal of the bad quality material.

BIR's European members have decided to draft a strategy on how to implement a subsidy scheme and present it to the European Commission as soon as possible.

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