

PRESS RELEASE

Recent BIR World Recycling Convention & Exhibition in Hong Kong (22-24 May 2017)

International Environment Council:

Recycling industry needs to be “on right side” of POPs argument

Brussels, 30 May 2017

Manufacturers should receive no exemptions that allow them to market goods containing persistent organic pollutants (POPs) unless they have first made financial provision for end-of-life environmentally sound management (ESM), it is argued in a draft position formulated by BIR and aimed at Parties to the Stockholm Convention on POPs. ESM should include separation of POP-containing materials from the goods and the cost of destruction or irreversible transformation of the POPs, the BIR draft adds.

POPs were a significant issue because of their use in a range of goods such as, for example, flame retardants, it was explained in Hong Kong by International Environment Council (IEC) Chairman Olivier François of Galloo. This was a problem for the recycling industry “because we have to clean up”, he told delegates to the IEC meeting on May 24.

Car and aircraft manufacturers are among those to have won exemptions to continue to market goods containing POPs until the year 2036 and beyond. Given that POPs were not allowed to be recycled, they must therefore be subjected to incineration or irreversible transformation, explained BIR's Trade & Environment Director Ross Bartley.

The issue of POPs was emotive - with tests confirming that babies are born “pre-polluted” - and therefore it was vital for the recycling industry to be “on the right side of the argument”, particularly if the industry was to be left with contaminated materials that it was not permitted to recycle, he insisted in Hong Kong.

“We will fight, you can be sure, to be heard,” Mr François underlined.

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Mr Bartley also noted the UN-EP Basel Convention was launching a partnership project focusing on waste from households. He urged private companies to become involved in the initiative in order to create a better understanding among policy-makers and regulators of the practicalities of separate collection of recyclables from households and the competitive services private companies provide for waste management and recycling.

At the same meeting, a local regulatory perspective was provided by Gary Tam, Senior Environmental Protection Officer in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China's Environment Protection Department. A "waste" in Hong Kong was any item or material given up by its original user - "whether it works or not" - while cargoes trans-shipped through Hong Kong were subject to the same laws as other imports and exports, he emphasised. Enforcement of stricter regulation is expected by the end of 2017: the general ideal is a convergence with the way the Basel Convention is operated in Europe (Annex VII equivalent), in tune with China's National Sword decisions.

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