
Recent BIR World Recycling Convention & Exhibition in Rome (30 May – 1 June 2012)

International Environment Council.

IEC focus falls on EPR and radiation

Brussels, 8 June 2012

There is a limited role for extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes where markets are not yet established. However, “sunset” provisions should be agreed to ensure these initiatives are ended as markets approach maturity, it was argued at the BIR International Environment Council (IEC) meeting in Rome by Robin Wiener, President of the US Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI).

Her comments reflected the ISRI policy on producer responsibility adopted in July last year. This states that the existing recycling infrastructure must be given an equal opportunity to participate in any producer responsibility programme developed, and that such programmes “should not include recyclables that are currently manufactured into commodity-grade products and sold into viable markets”.

In excess of 30 US states have introduced EPR-type laws, Mrs Wiener told a meeting chaired by Olivier François of the Galloo Group. These have focused to date on: used tyres; mercury-containing products; electronics; used carpet; unused paints; and hypodermic needles.

In a review of producer responsibility schemes in France, Igor Bilimoff of FEDEREC said the government “definitely loves them” whereas the compliance scheme systems

themselves lack a clear legal structure/status and create “disturbing” question marks over ownership of, and access to, material. In this same context, Mrs Wiener also described the possibility of the recycling industry losing control of certain material flows as “a real fear”.

The draft “Code of Conduct on the Transboundary Movement of Scrap Metal and Semi-finished Products of the Metal Recycling and Production Industries that may inadvertently contain radioactive material”, developed under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is a “well-considered” document that takes into account many of the concerns and arguments put forward by the recycling industry over many years, according to Ross Bartley, BIR’s Environmental & Technical Director.

For example, the draft code recognises that, in most cases, radioactive material found at a metals recycling facility has been delivered by a third party “without the consent or approval” of the affected facility. It also notes that “the absence or loss of proper control has led to the inadvertent incorporation of radioactive material into scrap metal”. Mr Bartley also described as “balanced” the acknowledgement that it is technically impossible to guarantee no radiation is present in a consignment of scrap given shielding and types of radiation being detected.

Likely to receive final approval next year at the earliest, the Code of Conduct is voluntary for IAEA member countries although elements could be adopted into national law, explained Mr Bartley.

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