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

Workshop on WEEE:

Spotlight on circuit board recycling

Brussels, 8 June 2012

A workshop entitled “Recycling circuit boards from electrical and electronic equipment” was held at the latest BIR Convention in Rome under the chairmanship of Manuel Burnand of Coframetal in France.

In a scene-setting presentation, BIR called for more information on companies to complete its comprehensive world map of over 14 of the world’s hydro- and pyro-metallurgical facilities engaged in refining metals and in certain cases other materials from circuit boards.

There are various qualities of circuit board - with old motherboards towards the top end of the scale partly because of their gold content, according to Peter Hagemann, Head of Production and Sales at Sims Recycling Solutions in Germany. Older boards contain typically 200g per tonne of the precious metal whereas the gold content in newer-generation boards is generally between 30 and 100g per tonne. This business is becoming more difficult, said the speaker, because of the decline in precious metal content.

Dr Otmar Deubzer - Scientific Consultant at the United Nations University’s Institute for Sustainability and Peace - confirmed that profits could be made from recycling waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). “But if you do this properly, you have costs,”

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he emphasised. The financial burden comes mainly from the need, he added, to combine high-tech machinery with significant manual dismantling.

Richard Debaube, an advisor to French company Terranova which has an annual pyrolysis capacity of 30,000 tonnes dedicated to electronic circuit boards, underlined the need to achieve a balance between environmental requirements and profitability.

Daniel Ott, Programme Officer at Swiss research institute EMPA, spoke of attempts to make the WEEE recycling chain in India more environmentally sound and safer without forcing “informal” family businesses out of the sector.

David Goosen, Business Development Manager at Canada-based company Teck, outlined current and planned in-house capacities for refining a range of metals from circuit boards in its lead-zinc smelter. Participants learned that Teck’s Trail smelter will continue to utilise CRT glass in its operation with a modest gate fee.

Ross Bartley, BIR’s Environmental & Technical Director, explained that the world body’s member companies have been recycling electrical and electronic equipment for decades and that, in the current Millennium, BIR has been fully engaged in the UN-EP Basel Convention Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative and in its on-going PACE work on the environmentally sound management of computing equipment. Furthermore, BIR would reconstitute and reinvigorate its committee on recycling electrical and electronic equipment, he said.

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