

PRESS RELEASE

Recent BIR World Recycling Convention (Round-Table Sessions) in Prague (26 - 27 October 2015)

Textiles Division:

Textiles recycling industry must look to demonstrate its know-how

Brussels, 3 November 2015

With the United Nations climate change conference (COP21) due to take place shortly in Paris, “eyes have never been fixed as intensely on recycling”, the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Prague on October 27 was informed by its President, Mehdi Zerroug of France-based Framimex. And with the future of the textiles recycling industry now “a political issue”, he said, “we have to show what textile recycling really is and not what too many people still think we are”.

In order to avoid becoming the victim of “inappropriate regulations”, he continued, “we have to explain our industry’s needs and show that these needs match the public interest.” The industry should look to demonstrate its collection, sorting and recycling know-how as well as its commitment to research and development, he emphasised.

The COP21 would coincide with “a difficult phase” for textiles recyclers, according to Mr Zerroug. In his own country, he reported, companies were facing everything from lower container productivity to problems in obtaining payments.

Severe challenges were also noted in other country-specific reports. For the UK, Alan Wheeler of the Textile Recycling Association lamented that the used clothing and textiles market “has got noticeably worse in the last few weeks”. Warehouses were full and companies were looking to sell more of their assets. “Business closures are continuing to take place; I suspect that we may see more,” he concluded.

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In the report for Belgium submitted by Pol T’Jollyn of NV Recutex, it was suggested “very high sorting costs and very low prices” for recycling material would mean that “poorer qualities of original will become very difficult to sort”. He added that the Eastern European market had been undermined by political instability and devaluation of currencies in some countries - a view echoed by Sauro Ballerini in his comments for Italy.

Export problems were also reported by Osamu Shoji of Shoji & Co., Ltd. Collections in his home market of Japan were at normal levels but export demand was falling and so prices were going down and volumes were “overflowing”.

In the first of two guest presentations, Hanna Ljungkvist of the IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute detailed an attempt within the Nordic region to redirect more used textiles into reuse and recycling from landfill and incineration. Aims include: to double the share of post-consumer textiles that are collected separately when compared to 2012; to eliminate illegal operators; and to create new jobs through collection and sorting initiatives.

Of the three related projects completed to date, one had investigated the potential for an extended producer responsibility (EPR) approach and for new or emerging business models, such as clothing “libraries”. A decision on whether to implement an EPR scheme was probably a year away, she added.

In a bid to promote high-standard textile reuse and recycling processes and to prevent tenders being decided principally on price, Germany’s Gemeinschaft für textile Zukunft (Future of Textiles Association) is championing guidelines which clarify important terms and requirements for high-quality collecting, sorting and processing. These voluntary guidelines also extend to documentation because “it’s very important that we have transparency”, explained association spokesperson Nicole Kösegi in her guest presentation.

“The guidelines should support the legitimate collectors, sorters and recyclers,” she insisted. “We don’t want to interfere with the market; we want to ensure better competition.”

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