

PRESS RELEASE

Recent BIR World Recycling Convention in Warsaw (28-29 October 2013)

International Environment Council:

BIR study to address “reality” of secondary smelter ESM

Brussels, 4 November 2013

Two of the key recycling-related issues currently occupying the UN-EP Basel Convention provided the point of focus for the latest meeting of the BIR International Environment Council (IEC), held in Warsaw on October 28. Guest speaker Dr Joachim Wuttke from German environmental strategy processes and perspectives developer Umweltbundesamt examined the latest text of the UN-EP Basel Convention “Framework for the Environmentally Sound Management (ESM) of hazardous waste and other waste”, as well as draft technical guidelines on transboundary movements of e-waste and used electrical and electronic equipment, with particular regard to the distinction between waste and non-waste under the Basel Convention.

Mr Wuttke pointed out that the objective of the ESM framework was to: establish a common understanding of what ESM is; identify tools and strategies to support its implementation; describe the linkages between ESM and transboundary movement; and suggest a set of indicators to monitor progress. He said voluntary certification schemes “could play a role” in terms of implementation tools, while indicators for verification of performance were being widely sought “even if it is not easy to have good indicators”.

BIR's Environmental & Technical Director Ross Bartley confirmed that the world recycling organisation had been involved in all technical expert group meetings leading up to the finalisation of the framework. He also observed that the BIR had funded a study into the environmentally

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sound management of secondary smelters around the world; likely to be published early in 2014, this was intended to establish “the current reality” and hopefully challenge suppositions that the environmentally sound management of permitted/authorised facilities varies greatly from one country to another.

As regards the draft technical guidelines on transboundary movements of e-waste and used electrical and electronic equipment, Mr Wuttke said discussions surrounding the waste/non-waste distinction had been “very complicated”. Having underlined that some countries remain fearful of being “flooded” with electronics in non-working condition, the guest speaker argued that the strictest of legislation would still not prevent illegal exports.

Commenting on legislation in general, IEC Chairman Olivier François of NV Galloometal in France noted that his home country had generated around 80,000 pages of new regulations last year, many of them relating to the environment. Although mostly well-intended, such a volume of regulation was impossible to assimilate such that the interpretations adopted and the actions taken by enforcement agencies could not be predicted. As a result, the effects of this “very bad situation” could be “disastrous”, he contended.

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