

Textile Recycling Association – Report to the BIR Textiles Division – 29th May 2013 – Shanghai

It gives me great pleasure to present this report to the BIR textiles division in what is the 100th Anniversary of the Textile Recycling Association. As part of the commemoration we put together a publication for our members about the history of our trade association. When doing this, I noted that in the late 1940s, the “Reclamation Association” as we were then known as formed a self-supporting export section for textile recyclers through two umbrella organisations called the “Waste Trade Federation” and “British Scrap Federation”. Having done this, the general secretaries of both organisations (Mr AP Hughes and Mr G Walter-Lloyd) travelled to Amsterdam and Brussels to negotiate the formation of an international federation that would bring together similar organisations from throughout post-war Europe. The negotiations were successful and in 1948 the Bureau of International Recycling held its first meeting, and the Reclamation Association became a founding member of the Textiles Division.

Although it is our centenary, the market conditions do not exactly reflect the “celebratory” mood that we enjoyed at our AGM and reception, which we were fortunate enough to be host in the prestigious setting of the Houses of Parliament in London.

Throughout 2012 we were receiving anecdotal reports that some of our members could not afford to continue paying the prevailing market prices and were eating into their capital reserves. As a consequence, in January we became aware of 6 established UK based textile collectors ceasing trading. In the last year or so we have lost over 10% of our membership this way and I suspect that there are more to come.

With so many businesses going bankrupt within a short period of time, there was a small over-supply in the market in January and prices dropped accordingly by around \$80 (USD)/tonne across all grades. Since then prices have remained relatively stable.

This modest decline in value still means that used clothing is a relatively high value commodity and the sector is still being routinely targeted by criminal gangs that steal used clothing. We welcomed the announcement by the UK Tax Authority (“Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs”) that they were going to set up a task force to look into the tax affairs of some “textile recycling companies” and we will assist them where we can. In addition, intelligence is continuing to be gathered by police at the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau. Despite this, enforcement action taken by police across the UK is variable. We recently had a case where a gang was caught in the act of trying to steal over \$500 worth of clothing that had been collected by a school and that had several thousand dollars worth of stolen goods in their van. The attending officers did not appreciate the value of the items or the serious nature of the crime and simply let the offenders go, without even issuing a police caution. It was a very frustrating affair.

Finally, I would like to highlight the forthcoming launch of the “Sustainable Clothing Action Plan 2020 Commitment” which is taking place next month. This is perhaps the most

significant initiative undertaken so far by supporters and signatories of the Sustainable Clothing Roadmap, who will be committed to playing their part in reducing the carbon, water and waste footprints of clothing in the United Kingdom by 2020, starting from a baseline year of 2012. The targets for 2020 will be announced later this year and there are seven key action areas on which efforts will be concentrated including:

1. Increasing re-use and recycling to recover maximum value of used clothes;
2. Developing actions that help keep clothes out of landfill.

We will be able to update you on this at the next Autumn Roundtable in Poland.

Alan Wheeler
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General Delegate – BIR Textiles Division.