

UK report to the BIR textiles division, October 2012, Barcelona.

The trading conditions in the UK used clothing industry are becoming increasingly difficult. In recent months we have seen the rise in the value of used textiles tale off. In some cases there has been a small decline in market values. We have also heard anecdotally that some charity shop collectors are becoming more particular about the quality of clothing that they are prepared to collect and the TRA is receiving more enquiries directly from charity shops, who are struggling to find collectors that are willing to continue paying the high prices that many charities have come to expect.

This year alone, three members of the Textile Recycling Association have stopped collections. In a trade association where the membership totals 55 businesses, to lose 3 members in this way is of notable significance.

With businesses struggling, one would expect prices to drop more substantially.

Part of the reason why this has not happened yet though is that people are continuing to enter into the industry because they think they will make a quick profit. They are attracted by the high value of the clothing. They undertake little or no business planning and think that they will make £1000/tonne (about €1250/tonne). We are receiving more and more enquiries from individuals who have started their so called “clothing and textile collection business” and do not have a clue as to what to do with the items they have collected or indeed how much they are worth.

Only after they have been trading for six months or a year do they sometimes realise they are not making any money and move on to something else. The problem is that there are hundreds of these collectors and they are taking supplies of used clothing from established businesses and values are continuing to remain high.

Another recent phenomenon in the UK are Cash for Clothing shops where members of the public can take their old clothing and the shop owners will buy their goods. In some towns, particularly in the North where property rental values tend to be lower, there are so many of these shops, that the amount these businesses need to pay for clothing, in order to attract customers, has gone up and up and some have been forced to close because they cannot make it pay.

The presence of these cash for clothing businesses in large numbers may also be having a direct impact on donations to charity shops in the immediate vicinity. Although the Charity Retail Association has reported substantial increases in the total amount of clothing donated to charity shops in the UK. They now estimate that around 363,000 tonnes is donated through charity shops annually. This is up from 250,000 tonnes in 2010.

Interestingly, the total number of charity shops has also increased and in some cases, where there are a substantial number of charity shops in a small area, some shops are struggling to maintain donation levels. This of course can be compounded by the presence of Cash for Clothing stores.

The Textile Recycling Association continues to work with the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and other stakeholders on a range of really positive initiatives to promote the overall sustainability of the clothing industry.

This includes the publication of the Textiles Collection Guide primarily aimed at local authorities. The guide provides practical information and examples of existing good practice for three key routes:

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- kerbside textile collection services;
- bring banks; and
- community re-use initiatives

The guide also provides information on appropriate communication strategies for local authorities.



In addition, several new pieces of research have been published through the Clothing Roadmap.

These include reports on:

- **Textiles flows and market opportunities** – which estimates that we now consume between 2.5 and 2.7 million tonnes of textiles in the UK each year, of which about 1.1 to 1.4 million tonnes are clothing. In addition, in 2010, about 619,000 tonnes of clothing was collected for re-use and recycling.
- **Valuing our clothes** – this report estimates that the value of clothing that we send to landfill each year in the UK is about £140 million (c. €175 million) and that the average UK household owns around £4000 (€5000) worth of clothes, but around 30% of the clothing has not been worn for at least a year.
- **Measuring the quality and value of textiles** - The impact of textile feedstock on value;
- **Textiles washing and drying trials** - Assessing the economic and environmental viability
- **Corporate workwear recovery opportunities** - Identifying opportunities for recovery, re-use and recycling

In addition, it is apparent that there are organisations in other parts of Europe and the World that are interested in the work and in certain aspects are looking to mirror the work of the UK Sustainable Clothing Roadmap.

Following the EU's Environmental Impact of Products Research (EIPRO) which identified textiles as having a high environmental impact in Europe, further research was undertaken on the "Environmental Improvement Potential of Textiles" in 2011. They presented an interim report at the Annual Sustainable Clothing Roadmap conference last year and identified the re-use and recycling of textiles as a key area to tackle in the EU. We are still waiting for the final report to be published.

Similarly the Nordic Initiative Clean and Ethical (NICE) group aims to support sustainable fashion in the Scandinavian countries. We have also heard about an initiative in the USA called "Wear It, Use It" which is a newly created portfolio of educational material which has been developed to promote textile recycling in schools and which meets curriculum requirements.

It is clear to the Textile Recycling Association that there is an opportunity for these various agencies engaged in promoting sustainable clothing to work together in promoting best practice.

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