

BIR World Recycling Convention & Exhibition, Barcelona (22) 23-25 May 2022

Non-Ferrous Metals Division:

Businesses delivering on “green” agenda deserve better understanding

Barcelona, 24 May 2022

Every external development - from the COVID pandemic to conflict in Ukraine and from higher energy costs to rising inflation - “has become a reason for hyper-volatility”, stated BIR Non-Ferrous Metals Division President Dhawal Shah of India-based Metco Ventures at the divisional meeting held in Barcelona on May 23. Faced with such “chaos” within metal markets and the wider world, he had the following advice for recyclers: “You need to be on top of your risk management.”

Mr Shah went on to note the growing support among governments for the concepts of Circular Economy, sustainability and decarbonization. And yet there was “a disconnect”, he lamented, when it came to government policies directed at those very businesses that were delivering on this “greener” agenda, such as the recycling industry. He expressed the hope that the future would bring “a better understanding”.

In this same context, divisional board member Murat Bayram of European Metal Recycling highlighted the dangers of introducing a ban on scrap exports through revision of the EU Waste Shipment Regulation, especially if there was insufficient demand from European consumers for all the material available. “The solution is to keep markets free,” he underlined.

“This really is five minutes to 12,” warned Mr Bayram in urging recyclers to contact policy-makers and to explain to them that, without international trade, “we won’t be able to invest in technologies, we will not be able to recover the materials”.

In a round-up of the latest BIR Non-Ferrous Metals Mirror publication covering all the key business regions of the world, Mr Bayram identified three dominant themes mentioned by expert contributors: energy cost inflation; lack of labour, including “huge problems in finding truck drivers”; and falling secondary aluminium prices as a result of the struggles within the automotive industry.

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An antidote to current market and legislative concerns was provided by the Non-Ferrous Metals Division's two guest speakers in Barcelona, with Spain's Inka Guixà and Norway's Tom Eng anticipating a bright future for both copper and aluminium.

Ms Guixà, who is Chief Executive of long-established semi-finished copper and copper alloy products manufacturer La Farga, pointed to projections of a doubling in copper demand to 60 million tonnes per year by 2050, driven by the metal's integral role in key developing sectors such as renewable energy, electrification, e-mobility and digitalization. This represented "a very good opportunity for the recycling sector", she said.

Some 14 million tonnes of secondary copper were generated annually and yet only 9 million tonnes were recycled "and so there are 5 million tonnes that are lost along the way". Therefore, the challenge was to innovate so as to maximize recovery while achieving quality requirements. "Traceability and transparency are key factors to meet demand in a sustainable way," she added.

Mr Eng, who is Senior Vice President and Head of sensor-based sorting solutions provider TOMRA Recycling, was equally bullish about growth prospects for aluminium. Demand in Europe alone was expected to jump 40% between 2018 and 2050, driven mainly by transportation, building/construction and packaging.

He went on to explain how established and emerging technologies such as, respectively, X-ray transmission and laser-induced breakdown spectroscopy could deliver the higher qualities of scrap that would be required to feed this demand growth. Improved sorting brought many benefits for recyclers, he pointed out, such as higher margins and reduced transportation costs as a result of increased local sales.

During a subsequent panel discussion moderated by divisional board members Susie Burrage of UK-based Recycled Products Ltd and Rick Dobkin of Shapiro Metals in the USA, Ms Guixà was asked about access to international markets. The market "needs to be free", she stated. If society was demanding sustainability, "this means that competitiveness needs to have free access".

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*BIR is the **international trade association of the recycling industries**. Around **70 countries** are represented through their national trade associations and individual companies, which are involved in recycling. BIR comprises **four commodity divisions**: iron & steel, non-ferrous metals, paper and textiles, and has **four commodity committees** dealing with stainless steel & special alloys, plastics, tyres & rubber and E-scrap. BIR's primary goal is to promote recycling and recyclability, thereby conserving natural resources, protecting the environment and facilitating free trade of secondary raw materials.*