

An unpromising market for plastics could be improved by a number of measures including preferential VAT rates, according to the Bureau of International Recycling (BIR).

The gloomy outlook was set out by Surendra Patawari Borad, chair of the BIR plastics division, who also called for a reduction of the legislative and administrative burden on non-hazardous recyclables.

Borad told the bureau's Amsterdam convention that prospects for the plastics recycling sector were "not very promising" at present. "For any business, the real driver is a financial one – unfortunately it is not working well. The market is 'rethinking' recycling because being green is costing money."

He quoted a [Forbes magazine article on waste management](#). Until 2013, the US giant invested up to £100m a year in recycling but had recently mothballed 22 of 126 recycling plants and renegotiated contracts with 150 municipalities. Borad added: "Customers in India ask why they should buy recycled plastics when cheaper virgin materials are available. Why should they take the hassles of compliance when there is not much difficulty in getting prime? Some Chinese customers have changed their business.

"The scenario in Europe is not that promising either. This is a wake-up call." He urged:

- **Higher landfill taxes**
- **Lower or zero VAT on goods produced from recycled materials**
- **Reduced regulation for non-hazardous scrap such as non-complex plastics and recovered paper**
- **Improved consumer awareness**

But he ended more optimistically by quoting an International Solid Waste Association assessment that commodity prices and demand would increase.

A fellow board member, Steve Wong (*pictured*), who is executive president of the China Scrap Plastics Association, said high-level meetings were being held in November between China and supplying nations, including the EU, to improve the quality of scrap imports. "This is an example of the government's determination to co-operate with different companies to make sure things imported into China are under control and also not damaging to the environment," he said.

In presentations during the session, it was revealed that Dutch end-of-life vehicle specialist ARN achieved a materials recycling rate of 87.7% in 2015 while energy recovery took its overall recycling performance to 97% – both figures exceeding the legal objectives of, respectively, 85% and 95%. Arie De Jong, ARN chief executive, reported that the operation was recovering 3,600 tonnes a year of low-density plastics, 2,200 tonnes of average density and 3,500 tonnes of high density. He identified a number of challenges for plastics recyclers, including PVC contamination in the high-density fraction, and the emergence of new and sometimes difficult-to-recycle materials such as thermosetting resins and carbon fibre-reinforced plastics.

Another speaker, Herman Van Roost, business development manager for recycling at Total in Belgium, detailed the virgin plastics producer's role in secondary materials. He described the recent introduction of a virgin molecular design incorporating substantial recycled content which outperformed virgin polymers. Van Roost said the product would "break open the minds of people and regulators", and demonstrate the possibility of delivering high performance with a high recycled content. A circularity theme was central to the presentation of Marc Pruijn, who leads on the circular economy (CE) at the Dutch ministry of infrastructure and environment. The government has set a target of achieving a 100% CE by 2050, as well as a 50% reduction in the use of raw materials by 2030.

To reach the first goal, roadmaps are currently being defined for the different materials, with the agenda set to be finalised next year.