

## REPAK MEMBERS' CONFERENCE

15 JUNE 2006

### OPENING REMARKS

ADRIAN GOODRICH, CHAIRMAN

Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you all here to the Repak Members' Conference – our opportunity to account to you, the member companies, for our stewardship over the past year, and to listen to you and hear the issues which will be of concern in going forward.

We are delighted, once again, to have with us Mr Dick Roche, TD, Minister of for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government along with an array of expert speakers, who represent Repak's most important partnership groupings.

We have two important themes to discuss here today

One, is how Ireland collectively is going to meet the costs of recycling as activity grows – and let me tell you that it is growing fast !

The other, is how we should prevent packaging arising in the first place. If we recycle our packaging, that is fine. But there are many ways where companies can reduce or even cut out completely some of the packaging that they are producing.

Today, we will be looking at some very practical examples of how Repak member companies are doing just that! We will

also be hearing from one of our speakers about a number of initiatives being taken in the UK to help prevent and minimise the amount of packaging associated with products.

We are delighted to welcome two prominent international speakers with plenty of experience in this area.

One is Henri Meiresonne, Chief Executive of FOST Plus, the recovery organization in Belgium for packaging waste, comparable to what REPAK is in Ireland.

The second is Phillip Ward, who is Director for Waste Implementation Programmes for the UK based organisation WRAP. WRAP stands for the Waste & Resources Action Programme and they pursue many excellent initiatives in helping businesses both to prevent and minimise waste but also to create efficient markets for recycled products.

We do not have an equivalent organisation to WRAP in Ireland. However, once you have heard Phillip speak, and you hear about some of the tremendous work they are doing, I am sure there will be many people in the room who will say perhaps we should have an Irish WRAP organisation.

And, of course, no event such as this would be complete without Andrew Hetherington, CEO of Repak, who will also be speaking on the programme.

It is Repak's policy to engage as often and as openly with our members and our stakeholders.

This conference is an opportunity for you, the members, to make enquiries from ourselves and, indeed, the Minister on any points of concern regarding your Repak membership or on recycling generally.

Our Awards Dinner will take place later in the year, where we will reward those members and stakeholders who have made an outstanding contribution to the recycling process this year.

We will be engaging separately with local authorities and our recovery operators at a conference in Athlone later this month.

Our website is receiving substantial numbers of visitors – which is not surprising, as it contains a wealth of information in relation to recycling results, Repak fees, subsidy levels and other key data. This year, our Repak On-Line Statistics service, which allows member companies to submit their returns directly over the internet, has proven to be a tremendous success.

The Repak newsletter is also available on-line, and this complements the other information sources which we make available. These include our results flyer, which is with you today, the Repak Yearbook, CEO Newsletters, conference presentations and other information sources.

Our door is always open. Repak is not hiding, and is not found wanting when it comes to engaging with our key stakeholders.

So please feel free to speak your mind on any aspect of your Repak membership today. We want to hear from you. It is only through engagement that we can work together.

So how are we all doing ?

Very well, is the answer.

I said to you last year, at this same event, that Ireland was required to achieve a recycling target of 50% of packaging

by 2005. I said that we were highly confident that this could we achieved, and I was right.

When all of the accounts were taken in, and all the figures added up by the EPA, we were not surprised to discover that we had in fact surpassed the 50% target at end 2004, and we were shooting well ahead of target in 2005.

That trend is continuing in 2006, where Ireland is now fast catching up with the best performing countries in Europe.

The most distinctive feature of this rapid growth is the amount of domestic recycling which is now taking place. more than half of all households in the State now have kerbside collections, while the number of bring banks, civic amenity and other public recycling facilities is increasing year on year.

Last year, Repak funded the recycling of 340 million plastic bottles - which is the equivalent of 87 bottles a year for every man, woman and child in the country. Or, to put it another way, it means that every household in the country recycled on average 5 plastic bottles a week.

Many people point to the introduction of pay-by-weight as the measure which kickstarted domestic recycling in Ireland. There is no doubt that there is nothing better than a good economic incentive to get things going, and recycling is no different from any other process. That said, I believe that Irish people have taken to recycling in a hugely positive way, and going to the local recycling facility is now as much a part of the weekend's activities for many families and households as a trip to the supermarket or even to the church!

Though the increase in domestic recycling is something to be warmly welcomed, it unfortunately raises other large

questions – namely, how is it going to be paid for, and who is going to pay.

As you will all be aware, the cost of collecting, sorting and segregating mixed waste from a domestic green bin is much greater than, for example, collecting cardboard packaging from the back of a supermarket or off-licence.

This extra cost is reflected in the subsidies which Repak must make to local authorities and other collectors who provide kerbside collection schemes.

The local authorities will argue – and with some justification – that the Repak subsidy goes nowhere near the full cost of collecting green bins, and that is an issue which must be resolved within the framework of shared responsibility.

But even while that issue is being debated, the volume of domestic recyclable waste being collected and attracting Repak subsidies is growing at a rate which can only be described as dramatic. And that must be paid for by Repak – or, to put it in a more direct way, by Repak member companies.

As businesses, we fully accept the concept of producer responsibility and the principle of paying in accordance with the amount of packaging we produce. However, the number of companies who are obligated under the Regulations could be regarded as comparatively few, particularly for a small country like Ireland. It is normal practice across the EU, with very few exceptions, for all companies who are involved in the packaging chain to make a contribution towards the recycling process. Here in Ireland, we have set very high thresholds, so that a very small number of companies – primarily the members of Repak – who are bearing the entire burden.

Andrew Hetherington will elaborate on these issues in his presentation this morning, but the message is clear – there is increasing pressure on Repak to fund a growing volume of domestic recycled tonnes, and that money must be found somewhere.

Paying for recycled packaging is one thing. A better thing is not to produce the packaging in the first place.

That may sound simplistic, but a growing number of companies are now actively seeking ways in which they can cut down on the amount of packaging which they produce. That way, everybody saves.

Repak is working closely with many of the member companies to identify and highlight ways where packaging can be reduced or minimised. There are many good examples of this new approach about and spreading these best practice examples is now an integral part of Repak's Best Practice Programme.

We are delighted to launch our "Prevent and Save" brochure this morning. This shows practical examples of how Irish producers have developed innovative ways to cut down on packaging. The case studies contained in this brochure are excellent examples of some of the positive actions being taken by member companies in this area. There are many more and they will continue to grow.

Today's conference promises to be a highly stimulating event. It is your conference. Have your say. We need to hear from you. That is what today is about.

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