

Repak Members Recycling Conference outlines Challenges Ahead

Ireland ranked the highest of five European countries for the amount of packaging placed on the market per head in 2002 according to economic consultant Peter Bacon. Speaking at the Repak Annual Members Conference in the Green Isle Hotel he also said that there was a need for further investment in infrastructure to ensure greater household access to recycling facilities. He went on to point out that a suggested target of close to 4,000 BringBanks is needed for Ireland to bring it closer to the European norm of 1 per 1,000 people. Noting the current density of 1,700 bring banks in Ireland is well deficient.

This years Repak Members Conference was themed "Recycling – its your future" and featured presentations from Pat the Cope Gallagher, Avril Doyle, MEP, Peter Bacon, Economic Consultant, Donal Buckley, IBEC, Adrian Goodrich, Managing Director, Gallahers Ireland and Andrew Hetherington, CEO, Repak.

Commenting on some of the obstacles facing recycling in Ireland Mr. Bacon also said that getting householders to engage proactively along with overcoming the lack of clarity in relation to obligations for packaging waste in the household stream was a serious issue for increasing recycling rates. Future challenges also include the need to divert 50 per cent of household waste away from landfill. Mr Bacon also pointed out that if all the thermal facilities proposed were put in place that the landfill requirement in 2012 will be approximately equivalent to that needed for 2002, shattering illusions that recycling and thermal treatment will reduce our requirement for landfill capacity.

According to Avril Doyle, MEP, Ireland will struggle to live up to the goals of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive if the proposed amendment to secure a necessary derogation for Ireland is not achieved. Without extra time for implementation, the ambitious targets for recycling (and recovery) of packaging waste being proposed by Europe for 2006 will be difficult to achieve due to the poor infrastructure, Ireland's island status and little indigenous recycling industry.

On a positive note, Andrew Hetherington, CEO, Repak said that the organisation is on target to achieve the 2003 national packaging waste recycling target of 350,000 tonnes, having spent over nearly €40 million in direct recycling supports over the last five years. However he pointed out that the deliverance of future EU targets will only come if new challenges are addressed such as a wider interpretation of "Polluter Pays" principle to include sectors other than the packaging alone. He also warned members of Repak that due to the lack of enforcement, rising EU targets and the lack of infrastructural investment the costs to Industry of meeting its recycling obligations would increase by nearly double digit growth at a time when Industry is already hurting.

Chairman of Repak and Managing Director of Gallahers Ltd Adrian Goodrich said that the success of recycling faces significant challenges such as the potential threat of the introduction of additional levies and unrealistic EU targets, which place Ireland at a disadvantage. He outlined that Repak estimates that 'free riders' or those who are not complying with the current regulations were costing Industry over €5 million per year, and reminded Government that Repak members had bought into a voluntary scheme on the understanding that all would bear the cost rather than the few in membership.

Donal Buckley of IBEC echoed the challenges saying that Ireland has a waste crisis in that it cannot manage its own waste. This he stated was reflected by Ireland's reliance on exporting significant quantities of waste, the scandal of illegal dumping and the lack of modern infrastructure. He also added that the lack and cost of access, combined with having the highest disposal costs in Europe presented a real threat to business.

The conference was part of Repak National Recycling Week runs until Sunday the 5th October. The theme for the week is "Start Recycling – Keep Recycling", and features a series of nationwide educational and promotional campaigns.

To assist and help consumer get into the recycling habit Repak, in conjunction with local authorities, have listed full details of BringBank locations nationwide on the Repak website www.repak.ie. This information is available through the Lo Call number 1850 909999 operated between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Last year Repak recorded and funded the recycling of 323,000 tonnes of packaging waste, which is 36% up on the 2001 total. The 323,000 tonnes equates to nearly 40% of all packaging placed on the Irish Market. The organisation also reported a 50% increase in Repak membership last year to 1208, with the greatest increase coming from the Independent Retail sector, which saw an increase of nearly 400 new members in 2002.

About Repak

Repak is a not-for-profit members based compliance scheme established under a voluntary agreement between industry and the Department of the Environment and Local Government. It was established as industry's response to the obligations placed on Ireland by the EU directive on Packaging Waste (94/62/EC) and is the only government approved compliance scheme under the Waste Management (Packaging) Regulations 1997. Repak succeeded in reaching and exceeding Ireland's National Recycling Target of 25% of packaging waste in 2001.

Earlier this month Repak launched a school based, plastic bottle-recycling scheme, which will initially run through 14 schools in county Wicklow and aims to recycle 70,000 plastic bottles over the next school year. The organisation has also launched a TetraPak recycling initiative in Dublin, Cavan and Wicklow.