ISWA POSITION PAPER

ISWA and Issues of Global Recycling

The re-use and recycling of waste is growing on an international scale. For many years there has been a legitimate trade in ferrous and non-ferrous metals, paper and several other items. This trade has allowed for suitable wastes to be reprocessed overseas to the benefit of the global economy and also the environment.

Twenty years ago in recognition of the fact that many hazardous wastes were being sent to countries which were incapable of handling them the Basle Convention was agreed. This was to ensure that no hazardous wastes were sent to countries outside of the OECD (Organisation of Co-operation and Development) for disposal or recovery.

There is a growing trend for the developed economies to send items to other countries for re-use and also to export a range of materials to those same countries for recycling. Often the items intended for re-use are not functional and therefore they are broken up to reclaim the value of the materials in these items. For the wastes exported it is that they are too mixed compared to recoverable wastes handled by reprocessors in developed economies so that all too often it is poorly sorted municipal solid waste that is being exported.

It is clear that there should be greater control over the international movement of second-hand goods and wastes in order to prevent environmental pollution and damage to people’s health and safety. The environmental advantages of re-use and recycling of these goods and materials must allowed in appropriate circumstances and must not be impaired by a failure to control their movement.

ISWA therefore suggests that in order to alleviate these problems the following measures are introduced immediately:

- Enhancing the provisions of the Basle Convention to include explicitly second-hand goods as wastes
- Increasing the checks made by enforcement authorities in the developed economies on exports of all those loads of second-hand goods and green list wastes known to be most problematic for handling in the LDCs
- Ensuring appropriate enforcement against those found to be contravening the requirements of the Basle Convention and other international and national controls

In the longer term, recognising that there are advantages to extending the use of items which may be redundant in the developed world but are still capable of further use overseas ISWA advocates:

- the establishment of treatment and processing facilities in the developing economies
- allocation of funding from the developed countries to the developing economies to ensure adequate networks of collection, treatment and processing facilities
- provision for the return of all exported items to the country of origin where no or inadequate provision for treatment and processing is made.