



A new approach is bringing together regulators, the Government, trade organisations and the waste industry to improve MRF management through collaboration, writes **Marcus Gover**

■ **ONE OF THE CHALLENGES TO MAINTAINING QUALITY INPUTS AND OUTPUTS IN THE WASTE** sector has always been the number of parties involved – and the way they communicate and work with each other.

This is why a new commitment to work collaboratively to provide proactive support to MRFs, local authorities and anyone operating a waste management licence is good news for everyone. With Roger Baynham, chairman of the British Plastics Federation Recycling Council, recently saying that the industry cannot source the quantity and quality of plastic waste needed to satisfy the UK market, the opportunities are clearly there – if only we can capitalise on them.

But for quality to improve, the whole process – from collection to handling within the MRF to materials leaving it – needs to be managed more effectively and efficiently so that the level of materials separation can meet customer requirements. This is on top of complying with the UK's obligations under the revised Waste Framework Directive, and other specific regulations in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

One of the most significant moves in this attempt

#### AT A GLANCE

The recycling industry is aiming to improve the quality of inputs and outputs at MRFs by improving communication between stakeholders and using best-practice case studies

by the waste industry to improve quality is the development of a new Code of Practice for MRF operators, formulated by the Environmental Services Association (ESA).

David Sher, ESA policy adviser, says that quality is best achieved through a combination of effective management systems and requirements rather than output constraints. "We see MRFs as central to the transition up the waste hierarchy," he →

## MRF MATERIALS STUDY

WRAP will shortly launch a key report called *Municipal MRFs Materials Export Study*.

The objective of the study was to identify and present, through a series of case studies, good practice approaches that MRF operators can take to ensure their material outputs are exported legally to facilities undertaking environmentally sound recovery.

The report includes details of the legal requirements currently in place for all members of the export supply chain, and identifies current practices and procedures that were found through surveys and interviews with key stakeholders involved

in the export supply chain.

Many UK MRFs are already exporting their output materials to meet worldwide market demand. This report will provide one set of documentation for those organisations already exporting, and it will also act as a good practice introduction to those MRFs wishing to enter the exporting market.

It is key that materials exported from the UK are delivered to a known reprocessing facility that has the necessary permits and equipment to recover the material so that it can be fully recycled. The report provides all the information needed to achieve this.

comments. “Recycling is a truly dynamic sector with rapid technology advances and, as the market grows, quality is increasingly becoming a differentiating factor.

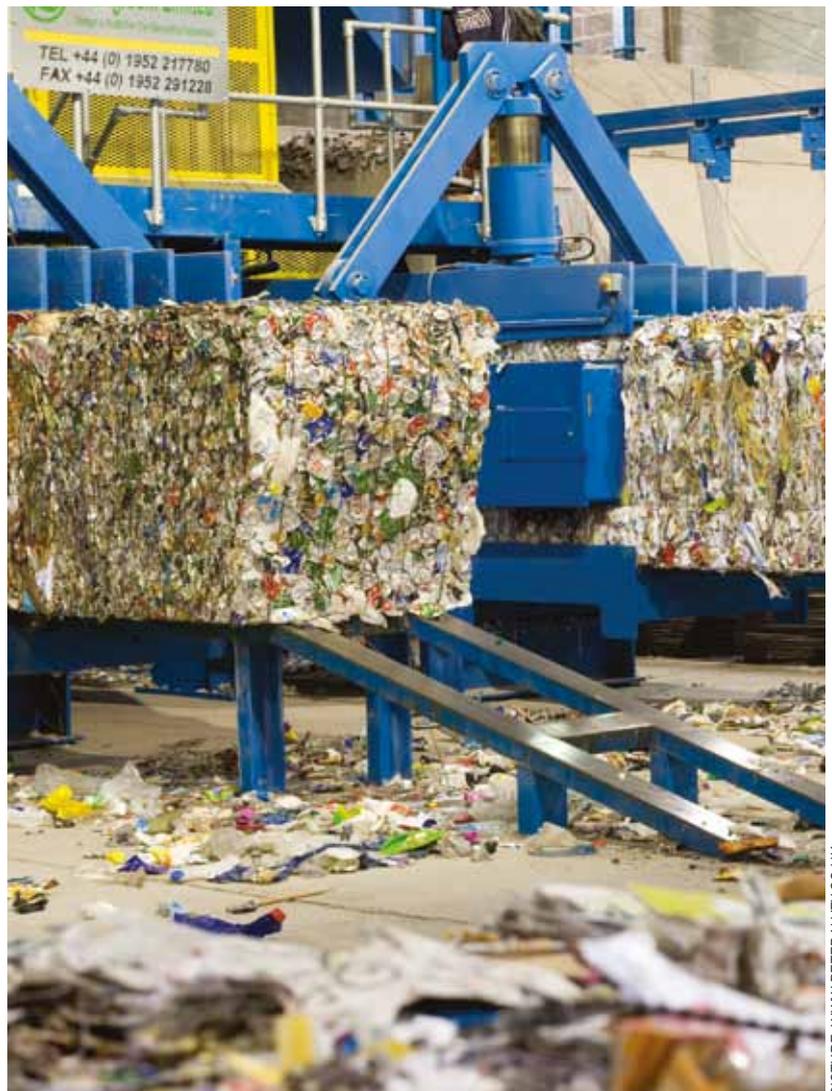
“This is why we have been developing this Code of Practice for operators. We need to strike a balance between providing operators with the flexibility to adapt to changing environments and ensuring a level playing field and a fair and transparent market for all.”

Flexibility is an important benefit of self-regulation and a higher level of producer responsibility; materials markets move quickly and operators could find prescriptive regulation difficult to manage. But the Environment Agency (EA) has also reconsidered how it works with the sector and is now looking at a more collaborative, constructive approach to resolve waste management issues.

EA environmental permitting manager Barry Sheppard explains: “We want to work more closely with industry in solving problems and improving processes. So while we will continue to inspect containers at ports, we are focusing on improving the outcomes from our regular site visits.

“We will be looking more closely at how waste flows travel from beginning to end, spotting problems early and working with the MRF or waste management contractor to address issues before they get out of hand. This is a very positive approach which we feel will provide the support needed to develop the industry in the right direction.” ■

*Marcus Gover is director of market development at WRAP*



PICTURE: WWW.PETERALVEY.CO.UK

Better communication at all stages of the recycling process has been shown to improve MRF performance

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## CONFERENCE: NEW APPROACHES TO WASTE MANAGEMENT

It is hoped that the EA’s ‘waste stream’ approach and ESA’s Code of Practice will not only move the sector into a more proactive position with greater producer responsibility, but will also help it adapt to any developments announced in Defra’s waste review (published on 14 June).

Also of assistance will be a series of reports to be released imminently by WRAP on aspects of importance to the sector, such as good practice in exporting materials, how to set up a robust contract between a local authority and an MRF, and opportunities with new materials and markets.

All these subjects will be briefed to the industry, alongside a summary of the waste review, at an event in Birmingham on 28 June called ‘New Approaches to Waste Management’.

WRAP is the organising partner for the event, and will be providing business advice surgeries for delegates, which can be pre-booked. It will also be showcasing its new reports, and has arranged for West Sussex County Council and Viridor to present a short case study on how working in partnership and

### QUALITY CASE STUDY

The MRF event will include a case study demonstrating how communication and working in partnership can improve performance. The Recyclate Quality Forum (RQF) is a multi-partnership between West Sussex County Council, the seven district and borough councils, and Viridor, which operates the 25-year PFI recycling and waste handling contract in West Sussex.

The RQF was established in 2010 as a result of concerns about increasing levels of the ‘wrong’ recyclates being collected from the kerbside across the county. These materials affect the performance of the MRF at Ford (pictured on page 17) and ultimately the quality of the MRF’s outputs.

improving communication has enhanced the feedstock and performance of an MRF to ensure high-quality outputs (see panel above).

■ To check availability for this free event

Actively managing the feedstock into Ford MRF is paramount to ensuring it produces the highest quality products for reprocessing and manufacturing into new goods.

As part of the RQF project, a communications group was formed to develop the communications element of the project to stimulate behavioural change in West Sussex.

The initiative has yielded significant results in its first year, including continuous improvement in the quality of collected recyclate, achieved by extensive training exercises, data management and practical solutions. The Ford MRF reject rate has been reduced by more than half.

More details about the scheme will be given at the event.

and/or to book a consultation with WRAP, please send an email with your name, job title, company name and contact telephone number to: [CQAdmin@wrap.org.uk](mailto:CQAdmin@wrap.org.uk)