

Paper under pressure?

The CPI's new recovered paper sector manager Stuart Pohler has had his feet under the desk for two months now. **Katie Coyne** spoke to him to find out how he's doing

AT A GLANCE

A look at material quality and MRFs, incentives to use biomass for EfW, carbon emissions and new EU regulations that will affect PRNs

■ **FROM HELPING TO REGENERATE MONSOON FOREST IN NORTHERN THAILAND, TO SAVING** the paper industry in the UK might seem a long way away. But not if you are Stuart Pohler.

He spent six months working for Chiang Mai University in Thailand on forest regeneration with hill tribes after completing a degree in environmental sciences at Sunderland University. He then worked for Ealing Council on sustainability issues before plunging into the world of waste, working as a recycling officer and then manager for the local authority.

During his time in the waste team at Ealing, the council more than doubled its recycling rate from 15% to more than 37%. It also secured the first contract in the UK to send borough-wide, source-separated food to an anaerobic digestion plant.

Pohler then became a consultant for environmental and engineering consultancy Entec – recently renamed Amec Environment and Infrastructure UK. So it is fair to say he has been around the block a few times, and is able to offer a breadth of experience to his new role at the Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI).

One issue he is getting to grips with is the ongoing debate about quality of material, the role of MRFs, and whether source separated, commingled or a mixture of the two is best: “From the CPI’s point of view, the use of MRFs can help to increase the recycling of paper – subject to output fibre quality being at least the same level as source-separated systems,” he says.

He welcomes Defra’s recent MRF Code of Practice as an opportunity to improve paper recyclate quality, and says the CPI will be feeding into its development. But leading on from quality are issues around energy from waste (EfW) schemes.

“Defra is saying it is technology-neutral but the energy department, on the other hand, seems to have a far more pro-combustion stance,” says Pohler.

The CPI is concerned that subsidies rewarding the use of renewable materials, such as paper, as fuel for EfW plants could end up disincentivising efforts to improve the quality of collected paper so it can be recycled in a closed loop.

Another area of concern is local authorities signing up to minimum tonnages for long-term EfW contracts. If they cannot meet their obligations, they might be tempted to send the poorer quality paper to EfW sites.

These areas will also be addressed by the MRF



MRFs need to offer good fibre output quality

Code of Practice, but the CPI will be keeping a close eye on the situation. “Having said all that, the CPI stance is not anti-EfW; it’s a good way of disposing of residual waste,” adds Pohler.

Another huge issue facing paper recyclers is the Government’s commitment to cut CO₂ emissions to 50% of the 1990 level by 2027. He says the coalition’s ideals to become the ‘greenest Government ever’ is “laudable”, but climate change needs to be tackled “in a proportionate manner”.

He says: “There are no similarly strict targets shared internationally, so there is a risk of putting the UK paper industry at a disadvantage because it isn’t a level playing field.”

He argues that the costs associated with the carbon price floor could potentially result in paper manufacturers, particularly multinationals, leaving the UK or going bust: “This won’t do much to reduce carbon emissions; it will just result in carbon leakage [emissions transferring to other countries].”

Another issue on the horizon, already flagged by metal recyclers, is the changes in EU waste regulations. These have resulted in an alteration at the point at which the packaging recovery note (PRN) is issued, and there is a potential for PRNs to be issued twice and for some material to be taken out of the system. Similar changes for other materials, including paper, are expected.

“The CPI has reminded the Government of the implications on metal that could set a precedent for other materials,” says Pohler. ■

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