

Future Copper Recycling

New research commissioned by the International Copper Association (ICA) has explored the challenges and opportunities facing copper recycling in the future. The research found that, although recycling consistently remains a major issue across the world, there are vast geographical disparities between the aspects facing Europe, the USA and China.

The research, conducted by Fraunhofer ISI, covers an important issue, given increased copper demand and the need for a greater volume of end of life recycling. Industry is reacting to more stringent regulation and new recycling technologies, but with the invention of more complex products, greater effort will be required to maintain and improve rates of material recovery.

The research found that in Europe, recycling systems exist and function relatively well, supported by regulation and the operation of large businesses and SMEs. European consumers are also presented with clearer methods of disposal. In the USA, despite a well-established recycling industry, differing states regulations and an abundance of landfill hampers efforts for greater rates of recycling. China, where copper demand is highest, has introduced stricter regulation such as the “Green Fence”, a new law halting the acceptance of poorly sorted or dirty shipments of recyclable waste from foreign exporters. However, within the country, regional disparities in recycling systems continue and consumers on the whole remain unsure how to dispose of goods correctly.

Luis Tercero Espinoza, Coordinator of Business Unit Systemic Risks, Fraunhofer ISI said, “The future of copper recycling encompasses a number of issues—including regulatory frameworks, economic and consumer behaviour—making it difficult to provide a simple picture of future copper recycling. However, awareness and volume of recycling are set to increase.”

Colin Bennett, Global Manager, Market Analysis and Outreach, ICA, said, “A circular economy requires efficient use of raw materials, as well as material conservation through its reuse and recycling. Copper is an inherently circular material, given it is infinitely recyclable without loss of properties. Amongst several issues, future recycling may require innovation in the regulatory field, new product design to facilitate end of life recovery and industrial copper recycling process improvements.”

About the International Copper Association (ICA)

ICA brings together the global copper industry to develop and defend markets for copper and to make a positive contribution to society’s sustainable development goals. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., ICA has offices in four primary regions: Asia, Europe and Africa, Latin America and North America. Copper Alliance programs and initiatives are executed in nearly 60 countries through its regional offices. For additional information, please visit www.copperalliance.org.

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