

Looking at the way German companies recycle their waste maybe a sign of things to come in the UK, as the restrictions on waste become tighter. **GGP** editor, **Nathan Bushell**, visited **Veka's** recycling plant in Behringen, Germany, with **Simon Scholes**, sales manager of **Veka Recycling** in the UK, to see what we should expect.

What comes around...

Mountains of pvc.



Keeping the beast's appetite at bay.



Where there's muck there's... a lot of gadgetry.



Re-extruded pvc.



Back to the beginning...

The majority of post consumer pvc waste in the UK goes to landfill, whereas in Germany pvcu is banned from general waste and is therefore recycled. Could we see this policy repeated in the UK? Whether it is or not, Veka believed it was worthwhile investing in a recycling facility in Swanscombe, Kent, in 2007, where post-industrial and post-consumer pvcu is ground down before being shipped to Behringen, Germany, where it is separated out, ground down further and re-extruded as pvcu pellets.

DENTING THE BOTTOM LINE

The recycling line in Behringen is the only one of its kind that is owned by a profile extruder in Germany. However, there are many other pvcu recyclers in Germany, and Veka has to 'win' the waste plastic on the open market. Quite different to the UK, where Veka has built up strong relationships with fabricators and installers to take the waste pvcu, and the amount of waste pvcu being recycled is increasing year on year. The biggest benefit to Veka's customers for this service is that they don't have to pay the increasing charges for disposing waste.

Both the cost of hiring skips and landfill, make an unnecessary dent on the bottom line, or make it difficult to compete for jobs competitively. Whenever I speak to anyone involved in the recycling of pvcu, they are always amazed that anyone pays to have their waste pvcu taken away.

Pvcu recycling in the UK is not new, but the first line at Behringen was built in 1993, and today it is a good example how recycling technology has developed – the line is a

mixture of old and new as more efficient machinery has been bolted onto the original element. The more recent second line is far different, having been designed as a single process rather than something that has evolved.

Walking around the plant I was amazed and intrigued at some of the separate process, such as the beast of a machine that chomped its way through something like 36 tonnes of pvc an hour, and the mountains of pvc that were constantly topped up in order to keep its appetite sated. And although Simon diligently took me through the process in order – so I could follow the path that the pvc would take – I was quickly lost among the maze of tubes, vacuums, conveyor belts, computers, and the overall efficiency of the process. The fact that so much money and effort has gone into this process must prove the old adage that 'where there's muck there's brass'.

Simon confirmed this. In its first year, Veka Recycling (UK) turned over £3m and 6,000 tonnes of pvc. In its second year of operation, Simon expects this to rise to £5m and 12-13,000 tonnes. This early success, and the forecast for many thousands of tonnes of waste pvcu to enter the waste stream for the foreseeable future, has encouraged the company to invest £5m in a new UK site. This will be in a central location, and purpose-built to handle the complete recycling process from initial crushing to final extrusion.

Whether or not the government decides to ban pvcu from the waste stream remains to be seen, but the realisation that there is money to be made from recycling is gaining momentum. The next step is for installers to realise that skips and associated costs are unnecessary, and to actively seek a recycling alternative.