

The issue of recycling PVCU waste is one that is building momentum and cannot continue to be ignored. Window Industries visited Behringen, Germany, to see VEKA's Umwelttechnik factory – 'the only facility of its kind anywhere in the world purpose built to handle window industry waste'

Something old, something new...

The PVCU market has been given a bit of a shake up recently. There is no doubt that issues such as sustainability, environmental responsibility and recycling have always been of importance, it's just that perhaps today there is more of a need – and perhaps incentive – to shout about them a bit louder.

As timber's 'Wood for Good' campaign has established itself and – along with aluminium – begins to claw back some of the ground lost to PVCU, now more than ever it is vital for the PVCU system companies, fabricators and installers to recognise the benefits of outlining PVCU's greener credentials to a more environmentally aware and responsible public – and at the same time reap some of the rewards themselves.

VEKA recognised these possibilities and outlined its ongoing commitment to recycling in 1993 when the company invested £12million in its 120,000m² Umwelttechnik facility in Behringen, Germany. The site is capable of recycling a

staggering 36 tonnes of material an hour, but most importantly, the PVCU is recycled to a suitable grade so as to be made into new window frames rather than lower grade end-uses where consistency, aesthetics and light stability are less of an issue. The company believes it is setting the pace with its 'closed material cycle system' and its recycling concept is based on an agreement between VEKA and its customers setting out a procedure for returning unwanted materials. Fabricators are provided with crates for off cuts and containers for unwanted windows.

Profile waste is collected free of charge and a small fee is charged for windows, doors and roller shutters. PVC, glass and

metals are then recycled at the Umwelttechnik facility, and ultimately reused.

As Simon Scholes, VEKA Recycling's sales manager points out: 'Germany is well in advance of where we are in the UK in terms of recycling PVCU. But the UK is catching up.' As such VEKA established its Dartford plant in 2007 and has plans to emulate its German facility's 'closed loop' process through considerable investment over the next four years.

To be where the Germans are at, however, the UK market clearly needs to be educated in the 'plus points' of recycling and perhaps there even needs to be a culture change. In Germany, PVCU is banned from landfill and as such fabricators and installers have no other option than to drop waste off at collection points or have it collected.

In the UK however, landfill tax is already at record levels and it is expected to increase as pressure builds for industry to recycle more. It seems simple but, as companies look for savings at all levels of their business, the message must be 'Recycle your post consumer PVC windows, don't pay landfill tax, don't pay skip bills, and make savings on each job'.

Simon Scholes points out that the banning of PVCU window waste going to landfill in the UK at the moment is 'no more than a suggestion, however it will

come eventually', but surely it makes financial sense for companies to beat the rush, recycle now and save money in the process. Why companies aren't doing this now can only be down to a lack of knowledge or a reluctance to change the way they are working – the 'if it aint broke don't fix it' mentality. Simon Scholes touched on this point when he talked about the quantities of post consumer windows in the UK: 'It's out there to be recycled – it's just making people aware of what to do to recycle it.'

With its facilities in France, Germany and the UK, it is clear that VEKA Recycling is at the forefront of the environmentally sound disposal of post consumer PVCU. Although many fabricators and installers have not been slow to note that removal and recycling this way offers real cost benefits over landfill – as well as the obvious reduction in environmental impact – the message is still not reaching all levels of the industry.

The 'Green theme' is not something that is going to disappear, quite the opposite, it will continue to build momentum over the next few years and remain a major factor. The benefits of PVCU recycling are there for all, so why it is the minority rather than the majority making the most of it remains to be seen.

● www.vekauk.com



(l-r) Martin Heckmann, financial controller for the VEKA Recycling Group, Simon Scholes, sales manager, VEKA Recycling and Brandofsky Werner – Technical Specialist



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