

A large, stylized letter 'O' logo. It features a dark blue outer ring and a lighter blue inner ring, creating a 3D effect. The 'O' is positioned to the left of the word 'Once'.

Once
upon a time ...

The Story of BIR
1948 - 2008

...BIR created
a united
recycling
world

'Conserving the future

by reclaiming the past...'

Scarcity of raw materials during World War I



14-18

During World War I (1914-1918), Europe was deprived of most of its sea-borne raw materials as submarines and other warships disrupted the shipping of these trans-ocean cargoes to ports in the UK and on the European continent. Hence, recovery and reclamation (the word “recycling” was not yet in use) provided one of the few alternatives to keeping European industry alive.

Luckily, in the early 20th century, Europe still had mines producing coal and metal ores such as iron, zinc and lead, and to a certain extent copper, tin and alloying metals such as nickel and chromium. In general, however, these were of a lower metal content than imported primary raw materials.

Europe’s primary resources, however, were rapidly dwindling as the “Great War” raged on. There was a growing “spillage” of strategic metals in the form of, for example, thousands of destroyed tanks and guns and many millions of shells, which were mostly lying on the battlefields of Belgium and France. And hundreds of ships which were lost, often with their cargoes. All too often, it was not possible to access these for the recovery and reclamation of valuable metals.

Besides, countries in Europe had yet to become accustomed to the large-scale “recycling” of metal products.



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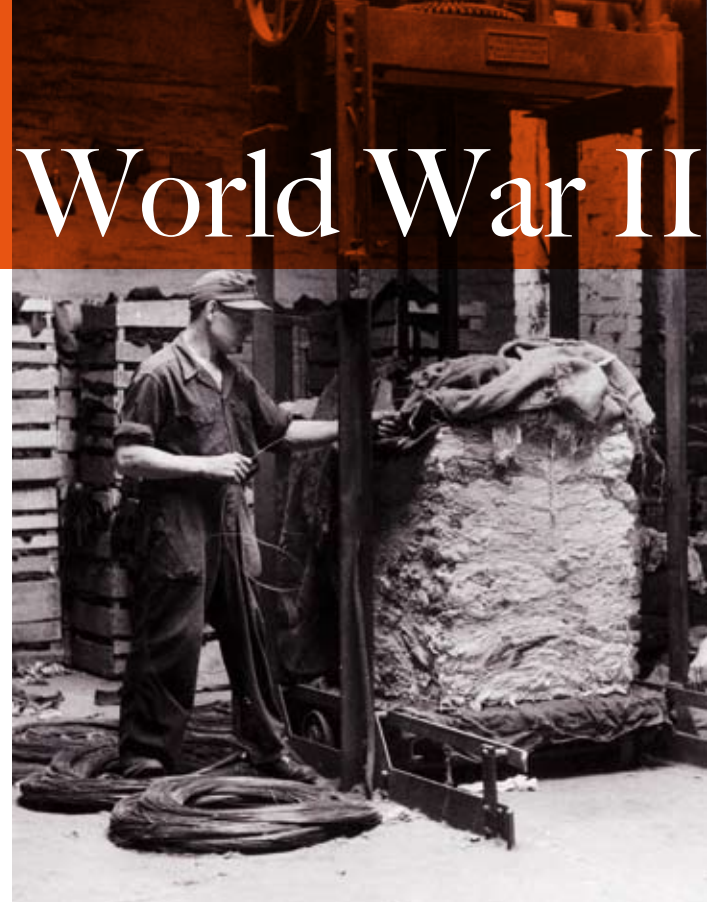
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Even greater losses of raw materials in World War II

World War II (1939-1945) brought even greater consumption - and even greater spillage and destruction - of these metals, with millions of tonnes of irrecoverable steel lost in ships sunk in the deep oceans, and comparable tonnages of bombs dropped by ten thousands of bombers, fighters and other airplanes which were now made of aluminium instead of the steel and large amounts of canvas used in World War I. There was little bauxite available for mining in Europe and the thousands of airplanes shot down during World War II were mostly burned out and hence were seldom recoverable.

However, in most European countries and also in North America, recovery of metals, rubber, glass, old clothes and other products and materials (including even organic waste) became mandatory. Severe penalties could be applied if these materials were not handed in to the relevant authorities or were not collected.





Export bans continue in the post-war period

Many forms of transportation - including ships, railway wagons and trucks - were lost during this dark age. Hence, economic recovery in Europe, the USA and other industrialised countries was slow in the post-World War II period.

As a result, most countries continued with their systems of rationing and controlled distribution of scarce goods and materials even into the late 1940s. Virtually all of them maintained an export ban on “strategic” commodities such as scrap even after this proved to be no longer necessary.

In the UK, for instance, the Ministry of Supply saw to the procurement and even price determination of scrap metals. It was only in 1953 that all scrap metals became exempt from daily governmental monitoring. During these days, “scarcity” was often used as an excuse for national authorities to restrict free trade in secondary materials; export bans were too often applied by them as a means of protecting or enhancing their own recovering industries.

In the post-war period, virtually all Western and Eastern European countries pursued a continuing ban on exports of ferrous and non-ferrous scrap metals. Local mills could consequently dictate their purchase prices for secondary raw materials, whose values were kept as low as possible. The bans also hampered recycling, trading and processing companies from resuming international business: for instance, shipbreakers could no longer buy foreign vessels unless they had managed to obtain one of the scarce licences available.

One of the first manifestations of general international trade co-operation was initiated in 1939, when plans were devised to form a geographic and political entity known as “Benelux”, incorporating the kingdoms of Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. However, World War II prevented the economic and political alliance of these three adjacent but relatively small countries from taking root. Non-governmental economic alliances were scarce indeed, and did not exist at all in the global recycling business. Besides, countries in Europe had yet to become accustomed to the large-scale “recycling” of metal products.

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And
then
there
was
BIR

Three years after the end of World War II, European recyclers looked to fill this international void, with the primary aim of achieving a resumption of the free international trade in secondary raw materials which had existed before World War II.

It was on March 18, 1948 that leading recyclers from the Benelux countries came together in Amsterdam's Amstel Hotel for a reception to mark the 125th anniversary of the then oldest scrap recycling company in the world, namely B J Nijkerk NV (BJN) of the Netherlands. [The company was founded in 1823 as a small-scale copper smelter which required copper-bearing scrap to feed its ovens. In the 19th and early 20th century, it developed into Benelux's leading company involved in ferrous and non-ferrous scrap trading, processing and also new metals.]

Immediately after the reception, two of the directors and owners of BJN - Bob and Hugo Nijkerk (the latter was to become BIR's fifth World President in 1954) suggested to their foreign guests that a Benelux recyclers' association should be founded, leading as soon as possible to the development of a wider international recyclers' organisation.

Bob and
Hugo Nijkerk



Their idea found support from neighbouring countries' recycling organisations. Amsterdam-based barrister/solicitor Dr Jaap Caron, who at that time was Secretary of the Dutch ferrous scrap organisation, was chosen as the Secretary of this embryonic international body.



Dr Jaap Caron

BIR becomes acknowledged first in Europe and later all over the world

On that memorable date of March 18, 1948, the first trans-boundary recycling organisation effectively began its active life. It was a remarkable idea for the time given that many of today's well-known international bodies still did not exist. For example, Benelux was only officially launched in 1958; the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was founded in 1951; and even the European Union and the United Nations had not been formed at this time. In effect, recycling established one of the first examples of economic co-operation between nations.

The founding fathers could not have hoped - even in their most optimistic dreams - that the infant BIR would have evolved over the ensuing 60 years into a global organisation comprising the great majority of industrialised countries active in recycling.



At the meeting in the Amstel Hotel, the presidents of the Belgian and Dutch scrap organisations decided to invite Luxembourg, France and Great Britain to join BIR. Later, the same invitation would be extended to the Scandinavian countries. At the first international and official meeting of BIR in June 1948, held in the Amsterdam Carlton Hotel, Luxembourg and France officially joined BIR which was officially named the Bureau International de la Récupération. They were followed by Great Britain at the start of 1949.

Also at the meeting in June 1948, Emile Savigner of France was elected as BIR's first President and Dr Jaap Caron as its first Secretary General. BIR's first headquarters were established in Amsterdam. Mr Savigner was succeeded by, in turn, Gerald Keith of the UK, Joseph Dohmen of Belgium, James Flannery of the USA and Hugo Nijkerk of the Netherlands.



Emile Savigner

On October 8 1948, Italy's application to join the organisation was immediately accepted.

It was also decided that BIR members would meet twice a year, in the spring and the autumn. These meetings would alternate between the capital cities of the various member countries and other important trading/recycling cities.

BIR was created as an international association of national federations. Commercial firms affiliated to these federations would be invited

to participate in BIR programmes and meetings, but did not need to join BIR as members. BIR Conventions were places to do business and to discuss trading issues. Four divisions were created to deal with the four major "materials" traded internationally to supply the world's industry: ferrous and steel scrap; non-ferrous metals scrap; paper; and textiles.



Jacques Valton

In 1951, Secretary of the French federation Jacques Valton replaced Dr Caron and BIR's office moved to Paris.

BIR soon became acknowledged by national and also international bodies, as well as by governments. Other countries applied for membership including Switzerland, the USA and Sweden where BIR held a conference in 1951. In 1953,



Six World Presidents are present at this table: Gerald Keith, Hugo Nijkerk, Joseph Dohmen, James Flannery, Robert Angles, Emile Savigner.

during the BIR Convention in Paris, the Federal Republic of Germany joined the organisation. And following a goodwill mission by Hugo Nijkerk and Lewis Hobday to Czechoslovakia in 1956, this became BIR's first member country behind the Iron Curtain.

More countries, more members and more delegates attend half-yearly conventions



Marcel Doisy, Marie Schaeffer and Sidney Danziger

In 1971, BIR's headquarters left Paris for Brussels, which was becoming home to a growing number of international organisations and associations, and which was also the seat of the European Union. The office of the world recycling organisation was initially located in the Place du Samedi in the centre of Brussels. Its newly-appointed Secretary General was Marcel Doisy, a multi-lingual non-ferrous scrap merchant and Financial Director with B J Nijkerk Belgium. Together with Marie Schaeffer, who had been working for BIR in Paris for several years, he gave BIR fresh impetus.

Independent European scrap trade associations - today known by the names of EFR, EUROMETREC and ERPA - were created to look after the interests of their specific recycling sectors within the EU and to represent the industry at the EU Commission.



Jan Levin

At world level, BIR continued to expand into other non-EU countries, and in particular into Eastern Europe, Russia and Asia. Under the direction of Mr Doisy and the leadership of BIR Presidents Sidney Danziger of the USA and Jan Levin of Denmark, BIR developed strongly between 1971 and 1981 to become the international federation for recycling.

New communications programmes and tools were developed, the well-known BIR logo was designed and adopted, and direct membership from commercial enterprises was encouraged, particularly from countries where there were no national federations.

BIR and its first member countries managed to secure the opening of frontiers to recycling commodities within what was later to become the European Community (and subsequently the EU). They also began to open up trade to non-EU destinations, or to so-called "third countries", but it was not until

BIR gains another dimension

1979 that, after intense lobbying, the Netherlands became the first country within the EU to free up this trade such that Dutch scrap exports to the whole world were legalised. Within a short time, virtually all EU members followed suit.

Mr Doisy retired as Secretary General in 1981 and was succeeded by Francis Veys, a lawyer specialising in international matters who had been Mr Doisy's right-hand man for six years.



Francis Veys, Marcel Doisy and Alfred Cooper

Over the last 25 years, BIR has taken on another dimension in building its global status. During the 1980s and 1990s, BIR attracted interest from large international institutions for environmental protection, energy saving and waste management. Recycling became a highly recognised activity and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNCTAD, the OECD, the EU and governments of all the major nations looked to BIR for its assistance and expertise on recycling matters.

In 1972, the Swedish capital Stockholm hosted the first world summit on the environment, during which leaders from all the major countries decided to focus on sustainable development. In the same year the 'Club of Rome' published its conclusions and predicted an imminent scarcity of raw materials - in its famous book "The limits to growth" of which more than a million copies were sold world-wide - while the first oil crisis had compelled the world's governments and its citizens to acknowledge the dangers and nuisance caused by non-regulated economic growth and uncontrolled production of consumer goods. Environmental legislation and waste management regulations became stricter and stricter, hampering the normal flow of key recyclables and forcing the original recycling sector to reorganise itself.

The Basel Convention (UNEP) and the OECD were the two main bodies with which BIR had to co-operate in order to ensure the continuity of free and fair international trade in secondary materials. Having always focused on international meetings to facilitate trade worldwide, BIR and its members had now to become more active on legislative issues which could potentially impact on the world market and prevent new, emerging economies from being supplied with vital raw materials.



Stockholm 75



Singapore 1990



Hong Kong 1996



Beijing 2006



Having already held meetings outside of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, BIR decided to pay more regular visits to new markets in Eastern Europe and the Far East. The twice-yearly conventions were now attracting more than 1000 delegates, making the choice of venue ever more difficult.

BIR held its first meeting in Asia in 1990 - an event which attracted hundreds of international recyclers to Singapore, including many new Asian companies. The organisation decided to repeat this successful experience and another world convention was arranged for Hong Kong in 1996. In 2006, BIR held its Spring Convention in Beijing while Dubai - a major gateway to the Indian market - will shortly welcome all the major players in the international recycling market.

But it became apparent in the 1990s that BIR, which was originally based on the membership of national associations, could not progress without deep restructuring. Indeed, many national associations could not muster the financial strength required by BIR to fund its programmes as they also needed to deal with similar legislative changes in their own countries. Also in many of these new countries where recycling operators wanted to be more active within BIR, there were no structured national associations.

**BIR
restructures
itself
to address
legislative
and other
issues**



In 1995, a new BIR emerged following considerable work and intense internal lobbying under the leadership of some key BIR officers such as Anthony Bird, Raymond George and Jean-Pierre Lehoux. Individual company membership would henceforth be compulsory for attending BIR meetings and for sitting on BIR divisional boards. At the same time, national associations' membership dues would be heavily reduced. A decade earlier, it had been decided to add several commodity committees to the four original commodity divisions. Covering stainless steel, plastics and tyres, no membership dues would be required for these.

BIR also acquired a new name: the Bureau of International Recycling (in French, Bureau International de la Récupération et du Recyclage). Internal decision-making procedures were altered to facilitate rapid action while Mr Veys was named Director General (rather than Secretary General) of the organisation. In parallel, BIR's daughter associations within the EU were made financially stronger through higher national association membership dues: these were based at the BIR office in Brussels in order to ensure synergy and efficiency in dealing with EU issues and in working with EU institutions. BIR's finances became healthier, allowing the organisation to appoint top professionals in-house and to hire external consultants and law firms to deal with issues which were becoming more and more complex.

With more than 40 national member federations and 750 commercial firms from more than 70 countries representing hundreds of thousands of employees, BIR has become one of the world's most prestigious bodies, as well as a global leader in sustainable development in that it represents a model industry in terms of energy saving and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. The recycling industry has a major role to play in the world's future, not only as a major industrial sector supplying more than 50% of global industry's raw materials needs, but also as a public utility because of its environmental contribution and its role as a jobs provider on a massive scale.



BIR
members'
contribution
and
challenges
in the new
world
economy



Despite its exceptionally positive outlook, there are problems from which BIR cannot hide or ignore. To help achieve indispensable industrial activity in the context of sustainable development, recycling must take into account social, technical and regulatory imperatives which - if not mastered - could prevent the sector from fulfilling its role and realising its promise. Regulations and legislation have contributed widely to the structuring of some material flows, the modernising of techniques and the optimisation of the quality of recycled products. At the same time, however, they have deeply modified the traditional “supply and demand” rules of business.

The original recyclers have to accept new players in the marketplace such as service companies and eco-bodies. We have also witnessed the creation of new monopolistic organisations and of closed-loop systems, contradicting the new world economic balance which should be based on free and fair trade of recyclables and secondary raw materials.

Government leaders, legislators and other stakeholders in the much-vaunted “recycling society” should not forget that, without the recycling of ferrous and steel scrap, the world would be deprived of around 44% of the raw materials used to produce steel. And they should not forget that the copper we use today contains more than 40% of recovered metal. The scrap contents for other major metals are as follows: lead 45%; zinc 30%; aluminium 25%; and stainless steel 40%. Meanwhile, energy savings accrued from recycling are: aluminium 95%; copper 85%; steel 74%; lead 65%; and zinc 60%.

Furthermore, around 50% of the paper produced globally is made from recovered fibre, which today is by far the largest single commodity to be shipped overseas and overland by 40-foot or 20-foot containers, followed by steel scrap. Each year, the oceans are crossed by more than 2 million containers filled with secondary raw materials.

As one of the solutions to mastering world economic growth, the recycling industry has a major role to play, exemplified by the huge flows of secondary raw materials from industrialised countries to emerging and developing countries - a noteworthy development given that, in the past, those same developing countries were the leading suppliers of natural resources to the Western World.

Newly-industrialising countries around the world - such as in Eastern Europe, South East Asia and the Indian sub-continent - will depend on increasingly large volumes of raw materials in order to develop their national infrastructures and play an economic role in the 21st century. With primary raw materials both scarce and expensive, consumption of either domestic or imported secondary raw materials certainly represents an alternative which none of these countries can ignore.

In 1972, it was suggested in the above mentioned ‘Report to the Club of Rome’ that virtually all metals would become exhausted by the year 2000, but this spectre has been removed by recycling. In total, over a billion tonnes of secondary materials are being recycled worldwide each year - including metals, paper, rubber, plastics, glass and other commodities. BIR members are proud to be the major players in this trade and therefore in the vanguard of sustainability. Today, no international organisation concerned with the economic and environmental welfare of the world can afford to ignore recycling - or BIR.



2008

The Presidents of the Bureau of International Recycling



1948-1950
Emile Savigner
France



1950-1951
Gerald L Keith
UK



1951-1952
Joseph Dohmen
Belgium



1952-1954
James T Flannery
USA



1954-1957
Hugo K M Nijkerk
NL



1957-1960
Dr Josef Husler
Switzerland



1960-1964
Robert Angles
France



1964-1970
Lewis H Hobday
UK



1970-1973
Sidney Danziger
USA



1973-1977/1982-1983
Jan Levin
Denmark



1977-1981
Alfred Cooper
UK



1981-1982
Leon Lazar
France



1983-1987
Heinz de Fries
Germany



1987-1991
Jake J Farber
USA



1991-1995
Jean-Pierre Lehoux
France



1995-1999
Anthony P Bird
UK



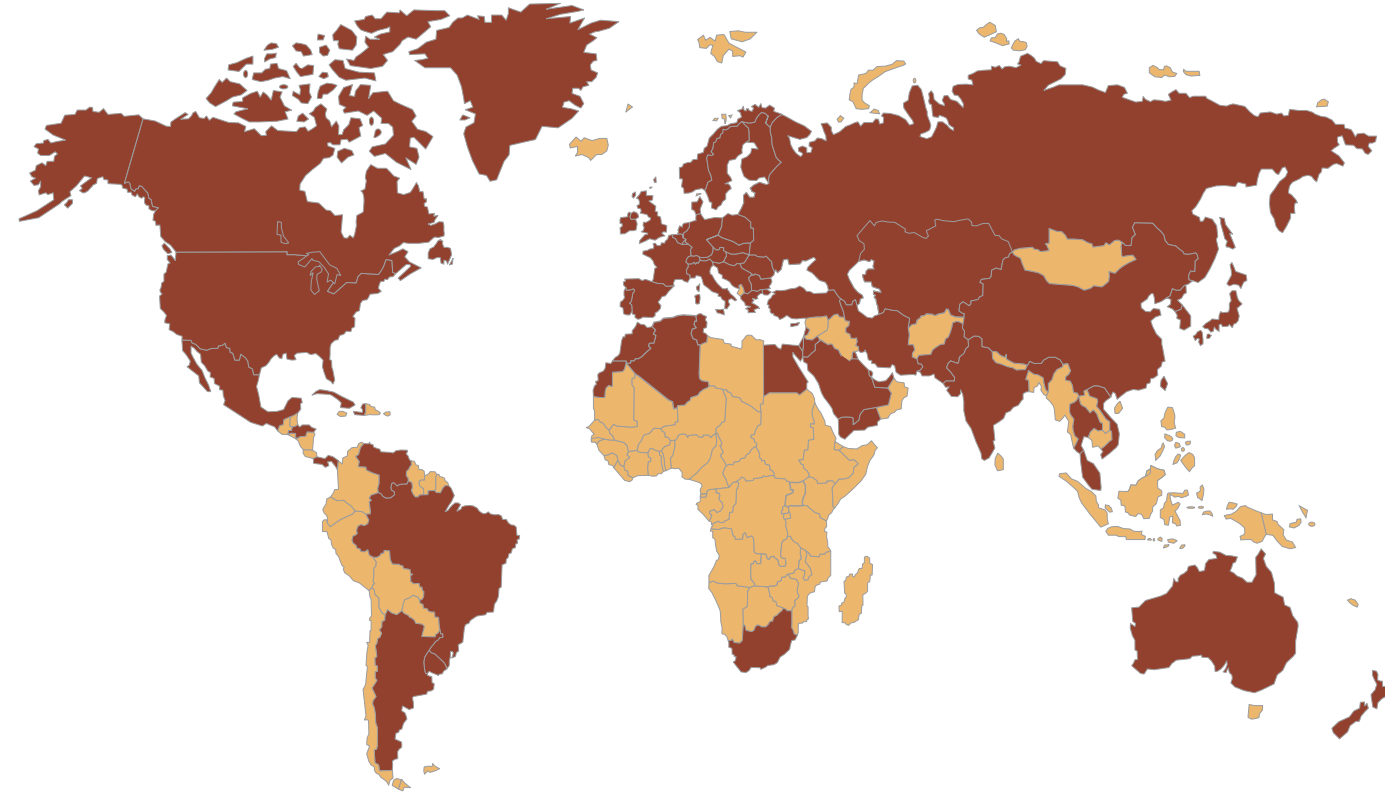
1999-2003
Barry Hunter
USA



2003-2007
Fernando Duranti
Italy



2007-
Dominique Maguin
France



■ Countries where BIR is represented

The
World
Map
reflecting
the
BIR
membership
spread
in 2008



Contributing Author: Alfred Arnold Nijkerk (born 1930) is the only living recycler to have been present at the founding of BIR in Amsterdam six decades ago.

He graduated in law from Leiden University in 1954 and spent two years in military service, eventually as a first lieutenant. In 1956, he entered the Nijkerk company based in Amsterdam - the sixth generation to enter the family scrap business which had been established in 1823.

During his 52 years in the recycling industry, he has been actively involved in the scrap and ship dismantling/recycling sectors, becoming Chairman of the then Shell-Billiton Recycling Division. For seven years, he was President of the Dutch Metal Recycling Federation (MRF) and later became an Honorary Member. He spent 26 consecutive years as President of the Dutch Scrap Association. He has been Vice President of BIR's Ferrous Division and also of the organisation's Shredder and Stainless Steel Committees. In addition, he has served as Chairman of BIR's PR Committee.

Mr Nijkerk founded 'Magazine Recycling Benelux' in 1966 and remained Chief Editor for over 25 years. He also wrote the 'Handbook of Recycling Techniques' in 1995, of which 7200 copies have been sold in no less than 86 countries. He has written the ferrous and stainless steel scrap market reports for 'Recycling International' magazine since it was founded in 1998.

Mr Nijkerk was knighted by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands in 1992 and attended his 100th BIR meeting in Milan in 2006.

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