

In the mix

‘Sustainability’ is a word that has been much discussed but seen little action within the construction industry. Now the cement industry is making moves, as **Noel Morrin** reports.

In November, an important step forward was made by one of the world’s most energy and resource-intensive industries to further develop its ongoing programme of work in moving the global cement industry to a position where it can contribute to a more sustainable society.

The first global stakeholder meeting to be held by the industry since the launch of its sustainability plan – *The Agenda for Action* in July 2002 – took place in Brussels during a day of discussions and workshops facilitated by the Environment Council, a leading facilitator in stakeholder dialogue.

Initially established in 1999 by 10 of the world’s leading cement companies, the Cement Sustainability Initiative (CSI) continues to expand as more members of the global cement industry come on board and sign up to the commitments made in the agenda. The CSI now includes 14 international cement companies with operations covering almost every country in the world.

For the cement industry, obtaining third-party views have, and continue to be, crucial in reaching effective sustainable solutions. The CSI is the first global initiative of its kind to bring forward the issues facing the cement industry and its stakeholders together on a global platform. Worldwide dialogues with key stakeholder groups have always been a key component in the CSI’s work in developing more sustainable business practices.

This latest meeting offered the first chance for those both in the industry itself and international policy arena to see the direction in which work propelled by *The Agenda for Action* is being taken.

It also provided the first opportunity for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to respond and comment on the activities undertaken by the cement companies who have signed up to the agenda.

More than 20 different stakeholder groups attended the meeting. Among them were representatives from IUCN, the UK Environment Agency, the International Federation of

Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers (ICEM), The Natural Step International, CARE International (France), the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation, Sustainability, Bird Life International and fund managers Sustainable Asset Management.

Key areas under discussion focused around the work currently being undertaken by the CSI’s six task forces and many of the more difficult issues which surround the industry – such as alternative fuels, monitoring and measuring, standards and emissions – in terms of both a local and global context.

Synthesising the concerns of different groups who often have widely differing priorities undoubtedly presents the industry with considerable challenges, but the stakeholder forum presents a real opportunity to make genuine progress via honest and open discussion.

The complex question of the use of alternative fuels and materials is a case in point and of particular interest to one of the industry’s UK stakeholder groups, including local authorities and residents.

For these stakeholders in the UK, and their counterparts in other, sometimes less developed parts of the world, the issue of the use of alternative fuels in the cement-making process has been of particular concern for some time.

Alternative fuels include recycled liquid fuel (RLF), processed sewage pellets (PSP), packaging waste and scrap tyres. Both the UK and other European governments acknowledge the use of scrap tyres in cement manufacture as ‘a valuable recovery route’ and ‘an economically attractive substitute for traditional fuels’.

However, while the use of scrap tyres as an alternative source of energy is in widespread use throughout Europe, it is not without controversy and has been greeted with both worry and scepticism by many European stakeholders. In countries like Japan, on the other hand, where alternative fuels have been widely used as an energy source in cement kilns for some considerable time, it is simply not a priority – it is accepted practice.

The UK cement industry knows that the use of such alternative fuels sourced from other kinds of wastes from domestic, industrial or agricultural sources is a real issue for many local authorities which are often faced with pressure from local communities and environmental groups alike not to allow their use.

It is for the CSI in the UK to positively demonstrate the genuine environmental benefits of using these alternative fuels – for example, by reducing the amount of fossil fuel

needed to produce cement and large volumes of material from going to landfill or being burned in incinerators.

For local authorities who are now facing a growing number of environmental targets – reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, waste minimisation and recycling targets, to mention just a few – an objective assessment of the potential benefits to be obtained by using such fuels will undoubtedly assume a much greater level of importance in their work, with lifecycle assessment playing a far more prominent role.

Councils will, for example, have to balance stakeholder concern against the fact that more than 40M tyres are removed from UK vehicles each year. The disposal of these tyres is a major problem, which can only grow with the banning of whole tyres from landfill sites in 2003 and chipped tyres in 2006.

Currently, individual companies are responsible for developing policies on the types of wastes and management practices to be used at individual facilities. While many companies already have guidelines on what materials can be used, and under what conditions, the content of the guidelines and the materials they refer to varies from company to company and is generally not a matter of public record.

This complex picture has created concern and uncertainty among many stakeholder groups about the contribution that the cement industry can make in helping to solve society's and industry's waste problems.

The CSI offers stakeholders and companies alike the ability to conduct an open, constructive dialogue to investigate the risks and benefits associated with the use of waste materials in cement kilns. It includes issues such as

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health and safety, economics, emissions and public concerns about using waste materials, with the ultimate aim of creating agreed guidelines that can be used by companies across the world.

Specifically, as a result of this latest meeting, the initiative's 'fuels and raw materials task force' will refine its draft good practice guidelines on the responsible use of fuels and raw materials. It will now place particular emphasis on the use of alternative fuels and materials as substitutes for conventional fossil fuels and limestone. It will also conduct further bilateral and multi-lateral dialogues in order to produce its final guidelines.

It is fair to say that all stakeholder groups share a common agenda as to how the business operations of both individual companies and the industry as whole affect local and global environmental issues and communities.

The CSI offers stakeholders a unique forum where they can come together to express their concerns and have real input into the actions they believe the cement industry needs to take to develop more sustainable business practices. For the cement companies in turn it provides them with a real opportunity to both listen to and address those concerns.

At the end of the day, without the consent and support of stakeholders, the industry will be unable to maintain its ongoing licence to operate. ■

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