

TIME TO RE-TYRE

Instead of dumping them, we should be reusing and recycling our used tyres

The EC Landfill Directive prohibited whole tyres being landfilled from July 2002 and shredded tyres from 2006.

Alongside this legislation, vehicle ownership is rising and, therefore, the number of used tyres is set to increase.

According to the Environment & Heritage Service (EHS) figures, in Northern Ireland alone 16,100 tonnes of used tyres are disposed of every year. In the UK the Environment Agency says the problem is even

bigger. Recently Northern Ireland has seen the EHS attempt to bring together the whole industry – retailers, used tyre collecting businesses and reprocessors – to promote the sustainable disposal of tyres.

Against this background, Northern Ireland's unique culture complicates the issue as tyres are routinely used as material burned for bonfires, which can add up to a costly £1million a year in dealing with the associated clean-up. The working group set up to look at the issue brings together local councils, the fire service, the housing executive and police service, and is an indication of how serious the need

for more rigorous control of the waste disposal of tyres in Northern Ireland is.

The EHS awareness programme aims to promote the reuse of waste tyres through education, regulation and influencing consumers. According to research, tonnes of used tyres produced each year are still being sent to landfill and, in addition to this, millions remain in stockpiles throughout the countryside causing environmental hazards. The tyres do not decompose and can be a fire risk affecting the air through their toxic fumes when alight, and they can also contaminate watercourses.

So what is being done to solve



Lynn Kerr
Managing director, R4

the problem? Tyre dealers are being urged to tread carefully and deal with their waste responsibly by using the services of organisations such as R4. Tyres need to be collected by a registered waste carrier and taken to a licensed waste management site. One of the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, R4's Craigavon site is able to produce a registration certificate and provide waste transfer notes for each load of tyres collected. Dealers can then be sure that the tyres do not end up dumped around the province. Unfortunately legitimate operators are put at a disadvantage by the illegal activity of rogue organisations offering undercut prices for their illegal services.

In Northern Ireland, through the October 2002 introduction of the Duty of Care regulations, garages and tyre depots are now personally responsible if their tyres end up in the hands of illegal operators who then fly-tip them: not complying with the regulations is a criminal offence.

R4 is registered to ISO 9001/2000 and achieved the prestigious Investors in People award earlier in 2004. It provides a customised collection service throughout Northern Ireland, including roll-on/roll-off walk-in containers for its larger clients' needs. It also accepts tyres from registered carriers at its Seagoe site so garages are not short of a solution.

R4 is currently undertaking a pilot project with Belfast City Council to recycle car tyres from its household recovery centres. It has also recently been awarded a three-year contract with Swamp (the Southern Waste Management Partnership, comprised of eight council areas) and the North West Regional Waste Management Group (or North West 2002, comprised of seven council areas) to recover tyres from all the local authorities within these regional groups, in line with the Northern Irish Waste Management Strategy 2002.

R4 is the first company from Ireland to represent the TiC Responsible Recyclers Scheme, which has now been reformed as the Tyre Recovery Association. It follows the waste hierarchy by segregating tyres for reuse and recycling, including re-treading them. When all other options have



When all the options for reuse have been exhausted, used tyres (top) are treated and shredded (above) for use in applications such as equestrian surfaces or children's playgrounds

been exhausted they are sent for reprocessing or shredding for a variety of products and applications, including equestrian surfaces and children's playgrounds. R4 currently achieves an admirable 100 percent recovery rate, with no tyres sent for incineration or landfill, which is great news for the environment.

R4 is also working closely with Queens University, Belfast, to research additional alternative uses for tyres in Northern Ireland. A number of products and applications are currently being evaluated.

But what else can we do? As

consumers we can ensure that the money we pay out for tyre disposal does go to legitimate tyre recovery operators, as all responsible garages will have no difficulty providing details of where their tyres go. This will allow the re-treading and recycling business to flourish. We can also ensure that we buy re-treaded tyres, already used widely in the haulage and aircraft industry to great economic and environmental benefits, and with the new ECE 108/109 regulations in place consumers can be assured that they conform to the same exacting standards as new tyres. ■