

SA hosts international recycling colloquium

South Africa can be proud of its accomplishments in the area of plastics recycling, which is one of the key building blocks of a green economy. South Africa is clearly leading the rest of Africa in this regard, and is not lagging far behind its European counterparts with its impressive recycling figures and innovative solutions developed for recycling and waste recovery.



This was the message by Cheri Scholtz, CEO of the PET Recycling Company (PETCO) at the first South African and European colloquium on recycling that took place in Cape Town recently.

The goal of inviting the European Association of Plastic Recycling and Recovery Organisation (EPRO) South Africa to have their first ever general meeting on African soil and to participate in this pioneering international recycling colloquium, was to create a platform for the sharing of ideas and set the stage for future global partnerships that would make this possible.

Eager to share knowledge

According to Scholtz, the international delegation made it clear from the outset that they were not only eager to share with South African audiences their wealth of knowledge and the valuable lessons they had learnt in Europe and the United States, but that they also wanted to learn from our experiences across all packaging streams in Southern Africa, the BRICS and other developing countries who were represented on the programme.

"Countries are all somewhere on the recycling continuum," Scholtz explained. "They are either in start-up phase, or could be years down the line with elaborate setups for recycling and many products containing recycled material that have market acceptance. In developing countries, like South Africa, where in 2012 we achieved a 50.5% packaging and paper recycling rate, the recycling industry is often seen as a means to provide income, skills development and create sustainable livelihoods. For this reason, waste management in South Africa, as a major element of the green economy, places a lot of emphasis on job creation and service delivery.

Avoid costly mistakes

"However, it is also important for us to learn from developed countries and to avoid making costly mistakes that could otherwise have been avoided as we transition from a change society into a circular society, backed by extended producer responsibility, consumer commitment and cooperation from all stakeholders in the value chain," she said.

This sentiment was confirmed by Peter Sundt, Secretary-General of EPRO. "We were very impressed by the innovation and commitment seen on South African shores. As is the case in Europe, extended producer responsibility is the main driver to stimulate collection and recovery of materials, where we achieved a recycling rate of 34% for plastic packaging in the EU in 2012," Sundt said.

Looking ahead, Scholtz said the colloquium has set the stage for on-going partnerships, dialogue and joint initiatives to fuel our pursuit of a resilient, innovative and sustainable recycling sector.

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