



Creating value out of waste

As the latest terrifying news about microplastics in the environment dominates headlines, it is clear that more must be done to recycle the vast quantities of plastic generated as a result of modern patterns of consumption. Thanks to companies like Plancher Environnement Sarl, Europe is already advanced in terms of the amount and variety of materials that are recycled, however much more could be done than is at the moment. This is Plancher Environnement's goal, not just because it is good for business but because it is good for the environment. Its aim is to find new uses for waste materials.

Waste collection and recycling is big business today. It has been recognized that there is still value in what is thrown away and that, rather than dumping it in landfill to rot for hundreds of years, there are more immediate ways to unlock that value. Cue the rise of recycling as a viable commercial activity. However, it is only really viable when carried out on a large scale. Plancher Environnement operates in the Drôme – Ardèche region of France where it provides waste collection, sorting and recycling services to municipal clients, industrial customers and

also private customers. "We collect waste materials in the four French departments of Drôme, Ardèche, Vaucluse and Gare," says Managing Director Lionel Plancher. "However, when it comes to the sale of the recycled raw materials we are active on the international stage."

Municipal waste collection is organized on the basis of long-term contracts. The various types of recyclable waste are collected in accordance with a weekly plan for householders with Plancher Environnement's own fleet of waste collection trucks. In addition, it leases containers to industrial



Waste sorting takes place at two depots serving the Drôme – Ardèche region

clients which are emptied when full. "We also rent out skips to private householders when there are

larger amounts of waste materials to be disposed of. For example during house renovations," adds Mr. Plancher. "We collect a wide variety of different waste materials, including wood, metal, paper and hazardous substances. We also collect and dispose of ordinary household waste as well as recyclables."

While householders are now required to separate waste ready for collection, the waste still has to be sorted on arrival at one of Plancher Environnement's two processing depots. Another important function it carries out is shredding to



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Plancher Environnement collects and sorts waste from four departments in the south of France

create a secondary raw material that can be sold on to customers throughout Europe. Key customers are in Germany and Spain but recycled waste from the region is also sold to China and India. "In the past, China was a major purchaser of recycled waste," says Mr. Plancher. "This is changing, however, as they have their own environmental problems and many of the processing factories were shut down because they did not meet environmental standards. Today, rather than process recycled waste, Chinese companies are buying finished raw materials. This

means that this part of the chain has had to move elsewhere.

However great the sense of responsibility towards the environment, recycling only takes place when it is commercially viable. Furthermore, not all waste can be recycled. "In this case, we have to think of ways to dispose of this waste without damaging the environment," says Mr. Plancher. "Our focus is increasingly turning to its use as a sustainable source of fuel." A new project has been recently started to build a new fermentation plant to produce meth-

ane gas. The new plant is due to open in 2020 at a total investment cost of eight million EUR. "There is huge potential in waste," insists Mr. Plancher. "It can be transformed into many different forms of energy either through conversion into methane gas or through combustion. Looking even further ahead, we are initiating a CSR project in 2022 which will produce combustible fuel out of shredded solid waste derived amongst other things from unusable agricultural produce or food waste from supermarkets. While it would be preferable to prevent such waste from

occurring in the first place, we cannot pretend that it is not happening and therefore finding an effective use is a priority."

Mr. Plancher already has experience with energy from waste. In 2012, he won the tender to build a biomass power plant for the town of Aubeners and the contract for its operation for the next 20 years. "The technology to create value out of waste is already here but it is not being used," says Mr. Plancher. "My vision would see us use power from waste and thereby reduce our reliance on fossil fuels."



Plancher collects waste with its own fleet of trucks



By recycling paper, millions of trees can be saved each year



Metal scrap is one of the most easily recycled wastes



Sorted plastic waste ready for shredding