

The future of sustainability for the single ply market

Aidan Bell, Co-founder of [EnviroBuild](#)

The Specification and Sustainability panel discussion at the [SPRA conference](#) on the 20th June 2018 covered the future of sustainability, a fresh look at product data and what specifiers want from product manufacturers. Aidan Bell, co-founder of sustainable construction company [EnviroBuild](#) spoke about the future of sustainability in the single ply market, and his discussion points can be seen below.

The Single Ply Membrane Industry

The UK Single Ply Membrane Industry uses about 8,500 tonnes of single ply every year. With the majority of repairs involving an overlay of the existing roofing, the waste is only available for recycling at the demolition stage. At demolition the amount of waste reused is measured by weight, and the industry can achieve 95% just by turning concrete and inert materials into aggregates, and sorting out metal and timber. The difficulty however for any recycling at this stage is the glass fibre reinforcement or the polyester fleece backing.

It's unlikely that SPRA could ever go it alone in a recycling effort with a tonnage this small, but there are third parties which could assist. However, this won't realistically happen without a huge increase in raw material costs, huge reduction of recycling costs (or increase in landfill costs) or legislation. The general principle is that the polluter pays for the externalities caused by pollution. This has been enshrined in European law since 1987 and isn't likely to change, though it has the potential to be watered down.

The Recycling Process

Case studies show:

PVC window recycling is economic. The PVC can be further used in windows because it only requires low plasticity. It is automatically mechanically sorted from the metal, which goes into a different recycling process.

Gypsum, which suffered a huge increase in recycling from about 30% to effectively 100% after legislation hugely increased the cost of landfill. The recycling is paid for by whoever has to send it away.

PV Cycle was a voluntary scheme set up by the manufacturers. The cost is simply passed onto consumers in the original price. However, compliance was <20% until WEEE enforcement which has brought levels >75%