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Breaking the Recycling Illusion: How Pyrolysis Can Transform Global Waste Management

Waste management is a critical issue faced by both businesses and municipalities, with significant implications for environmental sustainability, economic efficiency, and public health.



The Reality of Global Recycling

For decades, Western nations relied on China to process their waste under the concept of recycling. From 1992 to 2016, China imported 106 million metric tons of plastic waste, along with significant amounts of paper and e-waste, processing nearly 50% of the world's exported waste. This system transferred environmental responsibilities to developing countries.

In 2017, China's "National Sword" policy banned 24 categories of foreign solid waste, enforcing a 0.5% contamination limit. This resulted in a significant reduction of global waste exports and impacted Southeast Asian countries, which subsequently enacted their own restrictions.

The China ban highlighted challenges in recycling, showing that only 9% of all plastic ever produced has been recycled, while most was incinerated, landfilled, or lost. This situation indicated logistical issues in managing waste effectively and raised awareness about environmental inequality.

Pyrolysis: A Solution for Sustainable Waste Management

With global recycling systems facing difficulties, pyrolysis is considered a viable solution for managing waste. Unlike traditional methods such as landfills or incineration, pyrolysis thermochemically decomposes waste in an oxygen-free environment, converting it into biochar, syngas, and pyrolysis oil—useful resources.

This process can reduce landfill dependency, cut carbon emissions, and transform waste into renewable energy. Pyrolyzing plastics helps prevent ocean pollution, while processing biomass and organic waste sequesters carbon, contributing to climate change mitigation. By converting waste into usable materials, pyrolysis supports a circular economy, providing a potential long-term solution for sustainable waste management.

Climate Change: A Catalyst for the Insurance Market

The insurance industry, long reliant on historical data to predict risks, is undergoing a seismic shift as climate change introduces unprecedented challenges. The increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, coupled with rising sea levels and shifting weather patterns, are reshaping the landscape of risk assessment, underwriting, and policyholder engagement.

The Growing Impact of Climate Change on Insurance

Extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, floods, and wildfires, have become more frequent and intense. For instance, global insured losses from natural disasters reached \$82 billion in 2022, with events like Hurricane Ian accounting for a significant portion. These disasters not only strain insurers' financial resources but also challenge traditional risk models, which struggle to keep pace with the dynamic nature of climate-related risks.

In regions like Australia, the impact is particularly pronounced. Major floods in eastern Australia pushed insured losses to a record \$7 billion in 2022. Home insurance premiums have risen sharply, with some households in high-risk areas paying more than double the national average. This trend underscores the growing affordability crisis in the insurance market.

Adapting to a Changing Risk Landscape

To address these challenges, insurers are adopting innovative approaches. Advanced technologies, such as satellite data and Earth observation tools, are being used to enhance risk modelling and improve disaster response. Additionally, insurers are recalibrating their underwriting practices to account for the shifting geography of natural disasters. For example, hurricanes are moving northward, and wildfires are affecting regions previously considered safe.

The industry is also exploring new insurance products tailored to climate-related risks. These include policies that explicitly address flood, wildfire, and extreme heat risks, as well as parametric insurance solutions that provide rapid payouts based on predefined triggers, such as rainfall levels or wind speeds.

The Role of Policy and Collaboration

Governments and regulators play a crucial role in supporting the insurance industry's adaptation to climate change. Policies that promote climate resilience, such as stricter building codes and investments in flood defenses, can help mitigate risks and reduce insurance costs. Collaboration between insurers, policymakers, and other stakeholders is essential to develop comprehensive strategies for managing climate-related risks.

Opportunities Amidst Challenges

While climate change poses significant threats to the insurance industry, it also presents opportunities. The growing demand for innovative insurance solutions and risk mitigation services creates avenues for insurers to expand their offerings and strengthen their market position. By leveraging their expertise in risk management, insurers can play a pivotal role in building a more resilient and sustainable future.

In conclusion, climate change is not just a challenge for the insurance industry - it is a call to action. By embracing innovation, collaboration, and proactive risk management, insurers can navigate this transformative era and emerge stronger, more adaptive, and better equipped to serve their policyholders in an uncertain world.

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<https://smartenergy.org.au/smart-energy-council-welcomes-2-billion-investment-into-the-clean-energy-finance-corporation/>