

FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009

Agenda item 6. Chemicals

Intervention by the Swedish Presidency of the European Union¹



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Swedish Presidency of the European Union

Chemicals are inherent to our day-to-day lives. Chemicals influence health, agriculture production, climate change, biodiversity loss, functioning of ecosystems, desertification and economic development and sustainable lifestyle. Therefore, sound chemicals management has to be integrated into many policies in a coherent way.

The EU has gone through an intense period of learning on sound chemicals management and we think that we now have some best practices for our circumstances, although we recognize that they may not be directly transferable to others. Responsibility has moved from governments having to prove risks to requiring manufacturers, importers and downstream users to make sure that the substances they develop, place on the market or use do not harm human health or the environment.

The system remains science based and all partners are now engaged in a great effort to bring our knowledge up-to-date.

The new EU chemicals system, REACH, now covers registration, evaluation, authorization and restriction of chemicals and is in line with the life cycle approach. We are very conscious that REACH is a sophisticated system requiring considerable resources. However, the EU believes that it can be split into a number of self-standing modules that could be of interest to countries as they create their chemicals legislation.

We also work on finding safer alternatives, including non-chemical ones, and recognize the need to provide access to them for the developing world. In addition, we should strive to provide information on the presence of hazardous chemicals in products, where exposure both during use and waste handling is a health concern in many countries. In this context, we welcome initiatives to improve product stewardship by industry.

Furthermore, the EU recognizes the importance of implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals and recommends adopting a global system of recognizing and communicating risks/hazards.

We offer to share our experience in all these areas with others.

Mr./ Mrs. Chairperson, certain persistent organic pollutants are now regulated globally, but other chemicals of concern are still not. The EU commends the decision to start negotiation on a mercury convention. Considering the continuing large volume of production and use of chemicals, as well as introduction of new ones, it is likely that global regulation also of other chemicals of concern will be needed in the future. Therefore, further development and possible expansion of global chemicals conventions would need to be continually undertaken.

Simultaneously, we need to enhance our cooperation internationally to increase knowledge and access to information on the presence of hazardous substances in products, e.g. electronic equipment and toys, to reduce hazards during handling and disposal. We are aware that information needed for risk assessments is missing for a large part of products containing chemicals available through the global market, however, hazardous chemicals released from articles have been recognised as a significant diffuse source(s) of pollution. For that reason the EU nominated information on chemicals in products as an emerging issue in SAICM and participates actively in the UNEP lead process resulting from the ICCM 2 resolution II/4.

In order to achieve the 2020 goal, including through the implementation of the global chemicals agreements, strong political commitment and availability of financial resources are needed. However, the broad cross-sectoral scope of sound chemicals management means that there is no single solution for financing its implementation. Different funding solutions and funding partners are necessary.

Furthermore, enhanced cooperation and coordination among MEAs and SAICM is vital for an effective implementation of the sound management of chemicals and efficient use of available resources, while at the same time avoiding duplication of ongoing efforts.

To conclude, let me highlight the key messages our regional meeting should convey to the CSD session in May 2010.

In the view of the EU, implementation can be greatly helped by integrating chemicals management into countries' overarching sustainable development strategies, poverty reduction strategies and donors' country assistance strategies. The link between sound chemicals management and poverty eradication exists and the link to health impacts is evident.

Children poisoned by mercury and families who store their drinking water in obsolete pesticide containers, or those whose drinking water sources are endangered by obsolete pesticides and other outdated chemicals, will never fulfil their economic potential. Raising awareness to the costs of inaction and securing funding from programmes primarily addressing health issues must be a part of our strategy. We also need to urgently explore the role of the private sector in financially supporting the global sound management of chemicals.

Mr./Mrs. Chairperson, we believe that the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management provides an important framework for strengthening capacities for sound chemicals management and narrowing the capacity gap between the developing and the developed world. Moreover, SAICM is a broad approach involving many sectors and stakeholders, so that it encourages integrated consideration of different policy areas.

To achieve success we need political commitment and continued coherent and coordinated efforts to implement activities identified in the SAICM and in other international instruments and programmes focused on sound chemicals management.

This requires strengthening of both national efforts and bilateral and multilateral cooperation of all of us. The EU acknowledges and supports already ongoing work but sees the need for further and more significant progress in all these areas.