

**FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009

Agenda item 6. Chemicals

Intervention by the Women in Europe for a Common Future¹

B. What is the appropriate distribution of costs for chemicals management between society and business? What is the best mechanism for apportioning these costs?

We would like to point out that the Polluter Pays Principle², which is Rio Principle 16, and its application to the internalization of costs chemicals management is widely supported but not broadly implemented. When chemicals are produced or used in a country, it is an obligation of the government to ensure that human health and the environment are not harmed as a result of chemical exposure or chemical accidents. These costs are economic externalities that arise as a result of economic decisions by industry to manufacture and to use chemicals. Externalized costs include legacy issues such as obsolete stockpiles, as well as children whose development has been impaired as a result of pre-natal and post-natal chemical exposure, or the welfare of animals – only to name a few;

The global chemical industry has an annual turn-over of approximately USD \$3.1 trillion per year (trillion = thousand billion). If a global cost recovery scheme yielded only 0.1% of the industry's annual turnover more than USD \$3 billion would be available for sound chemicals management.

D. How can emerging problems associated with hazardous chemicals be identified?

We think, the best way to tackle emerging problems would be to fully implement four of the key principles for chemicals regulatory policy:

- no data no market, means comprehensive set of data and information about a chemical is made available to regulators and to users before it can be sold
- right to know would provide data relevant to the health and environmental impacts of chemicals not only to the government, but also to the public.

The progressive substitution of the most dangerous chemicals when suitable alternatives have been identified creates economic incentives for enterprises that are able to bring safer alternatives into the market.

The precautionary principle underpins the idea that manufacturers, importers and downstream users ensure that the chemicals they manufacture, place on the market or use do not adversely affect human health or the environment. However, nearly two decades after Rio Principle 15 recommended its implementation, political pressure has converted its use into a debate about whether action can be taken if there is uncertainty.

¹ The text is presented as received from the author.

² Rio Principle 16.