



International PRTR Coordinating Group

Seventh meeting

Wednesday, 12 September 2012, Paris

REPORT

The meeting was attended by representatives of the following countries and organizations: Belgium, Chile, Czech Republic, Israel, Japan, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and European Environment Bureau/European ECO-Forum. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Iñigo de Vicente-Mingarro, Vice-Chair¹, and serviced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

I. Adoption of the agenda

The participants agreed to consider election of the Chair and of the Vice-Chair of the International PRTR Coordinating Group as an additional item.

II. Relevant Items of the 15th meeting of the OECD Task Force on PRTRs

The participants debated the role of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) in promoting sustainability and good governance. USA informed the meeting that the country started attributing greater attention to this matter. Specifically, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) commissioned a research on green chemistry aimed at promoting use of nonharmful components in chemical processes. This, in addition to reducing negative impact on the environment, will also contribute to reduction of wastes thereby reducing costs required for the waste utilisation.

The following aspects were mentioned as important in relation to promoting PRTRs within the context of sustainability: health impact of harmful chemicals and public image of industries. The participants noted that it is essential to communicate this matter properly to communities and industries. In this respect, USA informed that EPA plans a public statement, which will highlight which industries made progress in reduction of toxic wastes, and a follow up campaign to promote the concept of green chemistry among industries. UNEP suggested to share with countries and partner organizations a poster that illustrates the impact of harmful chemicals on health.

¹ Chair was not able to attend the meeting due to unexpected work related matters. In addition, the Chair informed the Group that in light of unforeseen work related developments and competing priorities, he will not anymore be in a position to chair the International PRTR Coordinating Group.

The participants noted with concern that most polluting industries have demonstrated recently a tendency to relocate their installations to countries that do not have regulations or legislation related to PRTRs (such as e.g. China).

The participants also noted that the upcoming meeting under the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (30–31 October 2012, Toronto, Canada) will discuss among other matters the issue of PRTRs and sustainability.

III. Strengthening cooperation on PRTR: ongoing and planned activities

Government representatives and stakeholders shared information on their ongoing and planned activities to support implementation of PRTRs.

Belgium applies the Protocol on PRTRs and the related EU regulation. Its PRTR website strives to correspond to requirements of the European Environmental Agency.

Chile approved the PRTR-related regulation, which is expected to be formally published by the end of the current year. Chile applies a “single window” to which all relevant existing reports will be sent. This “window” (an agency), would then manage the transfer of data among all pertinent public authorities and the private sector. The work on PRTRs in the country is supported by UNITAR. Chile promotes PRTRs among other countries in the region of Latin America and Caribbean and it currently supports Columbia, which is planning to join OECD soon, in its efforts to establish PRTRs systems.

Czech Republic informed that it plans to publish new data set in the end of September of the current year. It also reported on its participation in a subregional workshop on PRTR aimed at promoting implementation and ratification of the PRTR Protocol in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia organised by the UNECE and Belarus (Minsk, 3-4 November 2011).

Israel informed that its Parliament has accepted the law on PRTRs and a formal decision on the adoption of the law is expected by the end of 2012. The country started developing its PRTR system; the first set of data should be submitted in June 2014. The country plans annual reports and a report on complete inventories once in seven years. In addition, Israel plans a survey on diffuse emissions that are not reported under PRTRs and it could prepare on the basis of the results of the survey a document for sharing it with other countries and organisations.

Japan briefed about the progress in implementation of a bilateral project with Thailand to help the country to build its national PRTR. At the proposal of GEF, it agreed to consider inviting experts from Cambodia to the relevant capacity building activities as to promote synergy and assist the implementation of the GEF project (see below).

Norway informed about its bilateral project with Tanzania on data management, which would possibly include a component on the PRTR data.

Spain is working on a new design of its website dedicated to PRTRs and continues to carry out activities to support the development of PRTR in countries in Latin America, in cooperation with the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo, CCAD). It also reported that the translation of the UNECE Guidance for implementation of the PRTR Protocol into Spanish has been completed.

Sweden prepared a report on PRTRs, which describes its system in English and is ready to share this report with other countries and organisations.

Switzerland plans a large promotion domestic campaign on PRTRs in the beginning of 2013 and could share its results and lessons learnt with other countries and organisations.

UK is about to introduce an on-line reporting system for several sectors of industry that have potentially low impact on the environment, but their reporting was still required by the country's law. UK plans to publish an annual document analysing trends and showing highlights in PRTR data from April 2013. The report will be available online via the UK PRTR site and one area of emphasis will be ensuring that the public and non-specialist audience can understand it. It provided advice to Israel and hopes for more engagement on PRTR and pollution prevention and control matters.

USA promotes PRTR internationally under the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, which plans to consider at its above-mentioned meeting the comparability of PRTR systems. The country puts great emphasis on pollution prevention measures through, for example, highlighting in EPA national report, which polluters made progress in reducing emissions. Furthermore, EPA decided to make available the raw data to the public until the verified data is released. The raw data is accompanied by a note explaining the status of the data. On the one hand, this practice contributed to the improvement of data quality submitted by polluters, and on the other, to decrease of requests and complains from the public. EPA also pursues a project on vulnerable communities and on the role of PRTRs as a tool for development. USA also informed that China expressed its interest in learning EPA experience in PRTRs.

UNECE informed about its capacity building efforts dedicated to the PRTR Protocol, including side events organised at the Rio+20 Conference; the Minsk subregional workshop; several thematic surveys; population of a capacity-building matrix at PRTR.net, and about coordination efforts by UNITAR and UNECE aimed to streamline use of the PRTR.net and PRTR: Learn webportals. It also informed about the 2nd meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to take place in Geneva on 20-21 November 2012, which will provide a forum for countries to assess their efforts in implementing the Protocol and will allow for sharing experiences and knowledge in this field. In addition, UNECE informed that it plans a subregional workshop to promote the PRTR Protocol in countries of South Eastern Europe and it might approach countries and partner organisations with the invitation to speak at this event. It also briefed about its mission to Mongolia aimed at promoting the accession of the country to the Aarhus Convention. The mission was organized at the invitation of the President of Mongolia and was led by the

Chair of the Convention's Meeting of the Parties. UNECE pointed out that introduction of PRTR system is very relevant for this country as its economy is largely based on the extraction industry. The recent discovery of rich natural resources in Mongolia (uranium, coal and gold) has drawn the attention of large investors to the mining sector, thus raising public concern about health safety as well as environmental and social hazards from such activities. UNECE invited countries to continue keeping the partner organisations informed on their bilateral PRTR-related cooperation with developing countries and with countries with economies in transition.

UNEP briefed on the progress in preparing a global legally binding instrument on Mercury under the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and invited countries to continue promoting PRTRs through the negotiation process thereby ensuring the reflection of PRTRs in the text of the instrument.

GEF briefed about the progress in implementing, through its POPs Focal Area, a global project that has the objective of designing PRTRs to report POPs in Cambodia, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Peru, Thailand and Ukraine and to continue implementation of the PRTR in Chile. With support of US EPA, this project also included development of infrastructure assessments for PRTR implementation in Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. UNEP is the implementing agency for this project and UNITAR the executing body. The activities in Thailand under the project have been stopped due to new financing and support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to Thailand to design a national PRTR. *GEF* informed that the project concluded in September 2012 and that it plans to put forward a proposal to continue the second phase of the project in the following best performing countries: Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia, Chile, Ecuador and Cambodia. *GEF* invited countries and organisations to co-finance this proposal either in cash or in-kind. It pointed out that it particularly lacks support to activities in Cambodia and invited Japan to consider its possible engagement in this area.

UNITAR informed about features offered by PRTR.Learn webportal and informed that the UNITAR Guidance Series for Implementing a National PRTR Design Project is being updated. A first draft has been made available on-line; final version is expected at the beginning of 2013. It also informed that the Ministry of Environment of Spain, CCAD and UNITAR are supporting a project in Central America that continues PRTR design work in Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras. United States is supporting PRTR design in Dominican Republic and El Salvador. These joint efforts are aimed to design a regional PRTR in Central America, which would be the third regional PRTR in the world and the first in a developing-country context. UNITAR informed that it considering Mongolia as a possible beneficiary-candidate for a PRTR design project under the Quick Start Program (QSP) funded by the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

OECD pointed out that a number of thematic publications prepared by experts under the auspices of OECD provide a useful background material for projects related to PRTRs. It will clarify the OECD policy regarding public access to its publications and will inform the Coordinating Group accordingly.

European ECO Forum informed that it was approached by NGOs from Mongolia and China regarding the PRTRs matter. It also noted that the experience of Japan, including its PRTR system, could be a suitable example for these countries.

IV. Election of officers

The Group elected Mr. Iñigo de Vicente-Mingarro (Spain) as its Chair and Ms. Vera Barrantes (UNITAR) as its Vice-Chair.

V. Major conclusions and outcomes

The participants reiterated their commitments to coordination and synergies for the work on PRTRs. They furthermore decided on the following specific actions to further cooperation:

- UNEP will share with countries and partner organizations a poster that illustrates the impact of harmful chemicals on health.
- Countries will continue promoting PRTRs through the negotiation process on a legally binding instrument on mercury, thereby ensuring the reflection of PRTRs in the text of the instrument.
- Sweden will share its report on PRTRs in English with other countries and partner organizations.
- Switzerland will share the results and lessons learnt from a promotion campaign on PRTRs with other countries and organisations.
- UK will share its report on PRTR data, when available, with other countries and organisations.
- OECD will seek a possibility to make available its material related PRTR to a broader audience as to facilitate its use by countries which have lesser level of PRTR development.
- Countries will continue keeping UNITAR, UNEP, OECD, UNECE and GEF informed on their bilateral PRTR-related cooperation with developing countries and with countries with economies in transition.
- Countries and organisations will seek a possibility to support future GEF projects on PRTRs.
- The next meeting will be held in November 2013 in Geneva, back-to-back with the meeting of the OECD Task Force on PRTR, Global round table on PRTRs and the meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol.
