



Secretariat

Distr.
GENERAL

ST/SG/AC.10/C.4/2008/21
17 September 2008

Original: ENGLISH

**COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE TRANSPORT OF
DANGEROUS GOODS AND ON THE GLOBALLY
HARMONIZED SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION
AND LABELLING OF CHEMICALS**

Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally
Harmonized System of Classification
and Labelling of Chemicals

Sixteenth session
Geneva, 10 -12 (a.m) December 2008
Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Progress of the work on the development of criteria for the classification and labelling of
substances hazardous to the terrestrial environment

Transmitted by the expert from Australia, Austria, France, New Zealand,
Slovenia and Spain

Introduction

1. Currently, the GHS criteria for environmental hazards cover exclusively hazards for the aquatic environment, while substances hazardous for the terrestrial environment remain unclassified even when information on their high toxicity for relevant terrestrial species is available.
2. Since 2003, the Sub-Committee of Experts on the GHS has conducted, in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), several activities for the development of terrestrial hazard criteria. In December 2006, the Sub-Committee decided to pursue the work, again in cooperation with OECD, as a multi-biennial activity to be completed after 2008.

3. The mandate given by the Sub-Committee to the OECD (see ST/SG/AC.10/24, Annex 2) for the 2007-2008 biennium is reproduced below:

- (a) To review existing systems (including those in place for pesticides in some countries) and evaluate the potential benefits of harmonizing classification;
- (b) To consider hazard communication needs, options and alternatives for coverage of terrestrial hazards in the various sectors;
- (c) To examine possibilities for the development of a generic scheme for the classification of substances as hazardous for the terrestrial environment under the GHS, taking into account the issues and options identified in previous documents, in particular, ENV/JM/HCL(2004)3 REV and informal document UN/SCEGHS/12/INF.5, as well as other alternatives that may be presented to the expert group;
- (d) To identify additional scientific issues that should be further investigated and to formulate specific questions for getting information on relevant gaps. The expert group may also identify relevant scientific bodies that could cooperate in addressing these specific questions.

4. The mandate also specifies: Discussion on numeric criteria and classification of mixtures will be postponed for the future.

5. The OECD created an expert group and produced a report which was adopted by consensus by the OECD Task Force on Harmonisation of Classification and Labelling and was circulated as informal document UN/SCEGHS/15/INF.28 at the fifteenth session of the Sub-Committee.

6. The OECD informal document UN/SCEGHS/15/INF.28 covers the items indicated in the mandate for the 2007-2008 biennium. However, as the work is complex and was already originally planned for a longer period, there is a need for setting the new items to be covered during the 2009-2010 biennium. This document presents a proposal for the items to be incorporated in the work plan.

Background

7. Three OECD documents related to terrestrial environmental hazards have been submitted to the Sub-Committee: document ST/SG/AC.10/C.4/2003/2 (Overview of historical and current work in OECD on terrestrial hazard assessment); informal document UN/SCEGHS/7/INF.15 (Issues to be addressed to develop the classification and labelling for terrestrial environmental hazards); and document UN/SCEGHS/15/INF.28 (Progress report to the Sub-Committee of Experts on the GHS: Terrestrial environmental hazards).

8. Despite the fact that some chemicals would be classified for both aquatic and terrestrial hazards, these documents have concluded that the *terrestrial environmental hazards are to be seen as different from and complementary to aquatic hazards and could produce a different classification scheme*; and that *for those authorities which also use classification criteria to establish control or management practices for environmental effects, classification for aquatic and terrestrial hazards should be distinguished from each other*.

9. The benefits for developing the terrestrial criteria do not only include the classification of dangerous substances not covered by the aquatic hazards. In fact, benefits were also identified for substances also classified for the aquatic environment, for example in the area of wastes and wastewater re-used as soil fertilizers and for irrigation, respectively.

10. Hazard based classification schemes including terrestrial components are implemented, at least for pesticides, in several regions. In the development of the GHS by OECD, it was agreed that the benefits for harmonizing existing systems applied to the environmental hazards in general, and therefore are not exclusive of the aquatic compartment but includes the aquatic and terrestrial hazards.

11. In the past, the lack of both test guidelines and data on substances was identified as a specific problem for terrestrial hazards. The OECD noted significant progress in both areas; due not only to the work conducted in the guideline programme for the terrestrial environment, but also to that related to the implementation of parallel efforts, such as the EU REACH Regulation, that will produce data or information for the most relevant groups of substances. Thus, these problems are not expected to be of particular relevance for the implementation of the terrestrial criteria in the future.

12. The discussions also concluded that the analysis of benefits and costs could only be done in parallel to the development of the classification scheme. Several countries/Regions have produced general short and long term impact assessments of implementing the GHS, which are also relevant for terrestrial hazards. The cost-benefit analysis should focus on those areas relevant for the Sub-Committee, and, therefore, should exclude the cost for specific implementation which is of exclusive competence of countries and regions.

13. Therefore, it is time for compiling the large amount of information and efforts generated previously on this item, and start the development of alternative schemes for balancing expected benefits and relative costs. Ideally, the scheme should be simple and easy to be implemented for self-classification by industry.

14. The work was already planned for several years, but the specific mandate only included the items to be covered during the first biennium. As the OECD informal document UN/SCEGHS/15/INF.28 already includes all specific items mentioned in the previous mandate, new items, following the discussions and issues which emerged during the preparation of the OECD document, are presented here for discussion and adoption.

Proposal for a mandate

15. The mandate given by the Sub-Committee to the OECD for the development of terrestrial hazard classification criteria was already identified as a long term process to be continued after 2008. Since the items included in the program of work for 2007-2008 have already been properly covered by the OECD in the informal document UN/SCEGHS/15/INF.28, it is proposed to provide the OECD, within the current mandate, with a clarification of the specific items to be covered during the next biennium.

16. These items should be based on the current achievements, and should comprise the development of parallel alternatives for the classification scheme (including the relative cost/benefit analysis for each of the different alternatives proposed).

17. As a follow-up of the four items addressed during 2007-2008, it is proposed to include the following items in the programme of work for the next biennium:

- (a) To compile, from the previous documents, the key elements and scientific issues to be considered in the scheme development;
- (b) To develop a set of alternative schemes, including one or more very simple and easy to implement classification schemes;
- (c) To evaluate the feasibility, expected benefits and relative cost of each scheme, considering the benefits for substances covered and uncovered by the aquatic classification criteria;
- (d) To suggest at least one scheme covering terrestrial hazard classification for the consideration of the Sub-Committee.

18. It is not foreseen to finish this work during the next biennium, thus, a progress report should be submitted by 2010 at the end of the biennium.
