

Global Chemicals Outlook

IPEN Presentation

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IPEN is an international organization working to protect human health and the environment from toxic chemicals. Our 700 Participating Organizations are public interest groups in all regions of the world and are mostly located in developing countries and countries with transition economies. They are deeply engaged in environmental and public health issues involving chemical safety.

I would like to begin by thanking UNEP for this important report. The Global Chemicals Outlook is a wake-up call for policy makers and the private sector. It clearly demonstrates that the health and environmental harms from chemicals are serious and escalating. These harms – and the costs that governments incur to protect against them – have a price tag, but the costs are not fully paid by the industry that makes the chemicals.

We have an opportunity to turn this situation around, but it will require urgent action by all parties – government, United Nations organizations, industry, civil society and others – to work together to protect the health of citizens from toxic chemical exposure.

While this report marks an important step forward, it also documents that with the rapid expansion of chemical production and use in the developing world, the harms have been growing despite all efforts.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development set as a goal “using and producing chemicals in ways that do not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment” by the year 2020. A global policy framework and program of action – the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management – was set up in 2006 to achieve that goal and both the goal and the Strategic Approach were re-affirmed this year at the Rio+20 Summit in Brazil.

While we have seen activity and some advances since 2006, chemical intensification is moving even faster. As a result, it appears that on balance, the global community is not moving forward toward the goal of safe chemicals management worldwide, but rather, is losing ground.

Three things need to happen to turn this situation around.

- 1) **Governments need to commit to chemical safety.** In order to be successful, the SAICM process and other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in the field of chemical safety need to become a higher priority and receive a higher level of support from national governments in both the developed and developing world.
- 2) More resources need to be committed to chemical safety. Governments alone cannot be expected to provide all the resources that will be required to globally achieve Sound Chemicals Management. Transnational companies are the main financial

beneficiaries of chemical intensification. These companies are primarily based in wealthy countries, but the governments that most lack the resources and capabilities needed to put systems in place to protect their citizens and their national environments are located in the developing world. This is an unbalanced system that benefits only one side.

While donor governments can and should provide more support for Sound Chemicals Management than they currently do, they cannot be expected to fully subsidize the sustainable national chemicals management programs that a great many developing countries need but cannot afford. The funds that these governments need to ensure that chemicals are safely managed and used should ultimately come from the chemical producing industries that profit from chemical intensification. A mechanism is needed to ensure the chemical industry pays the true cost of its products.

- 3) In addition to increased resources, there also needs to be a comprehensive plan for implementing sound chemicals management and a solid accountability mechanism to ensure funds designated for this purpose are effectively used. As the Global Chemicals Outlook expresses, civil society has a critically important role in both the development of such plans and also in the operation of an effective accountability mechanism.

IPEN groups understand the shift of chemical production and use to developing and transition countries, as the Global Chemicals Outlook documents, because that is where they live and work. Government officials in many of these countries find that NGOs have on-the-ground knowledge, expertise, and relationships that can be an important source of backup and help.

For example in Russia, IPEN NGOs worked with local communities to search for undocumented obsolete pesticide stockpiles. They found more than 6,000 tonnes of them – in various dilapidated buildings or on the ground. The groups were then able to successfully get these sites listed on the government inventory for clean-up and they were also able to convince governmental entities to allocate up to 70 million rubles for containment and safe storage to prevent further damage.

NGOs also help their countries by gathering data and monitoring the state of chemical safety in their countries.

For example, in Armenia, China, Philippines, and Thailand, IPEN groups have tested skin-whitening creams and soaps for mercury and found it in high levels in many of the products. Mercury harms the kidneys, heart, and brain and is a particular threat to the women who use these products. In the Philippines, when the EcoWaste Coalition revealed its findings, the government banned 50 skin-whitening products.

Governments need information about the country situation to make effective policies. Organizations of civil society often have this information and have an important participatory role to play in generating policies that are preventive and protective.

For example in Ethiopia, the government became concerned over toxic chemicals released from electronic waste but lacked information on the state of the problem. IPEN NGO, Pesticide Action Nexus Association, developed detailed inventories of

computers, mobile phones, refrigerators, and televisions in four major Ethiopian cities. The government appreciated the work and then asked the NGO for its help in the design and implementation of a national management plan for e-waste in the country including aspects of public awareness-raising and establishment of e-waste sorting and collection sites.

NGOs can help their countries leapfrog the fragmented sector-by-sector chemical management approaches that have characterized conventional chemical policies in developed countries. In addition, they can serve as independent monitors to help identify roadblocks, ensure the wise use of funds, and evaluate progress.

Full engagement by civil society is not simply a nice idea tacked on to make NGOs feel good about themselves – it is an essential element in a 21st century approach to tackling complex problems that affect both public health and economic development.

As the Global Chemicals Outlook indicates, preventing harm is much cheaper than trying to fix it. Doing nothing is the most expensive option, as we have seen again and again in the costs of after-the-fact environmental cleanups. This report shows conclusively that the potential harms from chemicals are growing quickly. If the world community remains unwilling or unable to take on this task effectively and on a sufficient scale, the longer-term economic and social costs will be enormous.

Next week, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management will hold its 3rd International Conference on Chemicals Management in Nairobi, Kenya. IPEN will be there to promote the implementation of this report's recommendations. We invite all governments, industry representatives, and public interest organizations to recommit themselves to the Strategic Approach and join us in accelerating the pace to a toxics-free future.