

IFCS-V HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER 2006

IFCS-V (Forum V) met in plenary throughout Tuesday. In the morning, participants addressed the issue of applying precaution in the context of chemical safety. In the afternoon, delegates tackled the need for further global action on heavy metals and the widening gap among countries in following chemical safety policies. The *ad hoc* working group on the future of IFCS met at lunchtime and in the evening. Two more working groups were convened in the evening, one on precaution and the other on heavy metals.

FORUM V PLENARY

PRECAUTION: Joel Tickner, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, US, said the session would focus on tools and approaches for applying precaution, rather than on its definition.

Franz Xavier Perrez, Switzerland, described different views on precaution and its status in international law, and emphasized the importance of developing and applying tools and approaches.

Johanna Lissinger Peitz, Swedish Chemicals Inspectorate, presented a web-based tool to facilitate the application of precaution by industry, developed with stakeholder participation. She said the tool is intended to preventatively reduce risks from chemicals by providing a guide for decision-makers to set risk-reduction priorities.

John Shoaff, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), highlighted EPA's Chemical Review Process, designed to prevent health and environmental risks, which can result in a chemical being regulated, withdrawn or dropped from further review. He stressed that EPA's tools and models have wide national and international use.

Jesús Marín Ruiz, National Toxicology Center, Nicaragua, noting acute contaminations caused by specific pesticides, highlighted a study on their toxic and environmental effects, agricultural efficiency and on available alternatives to those pesticides in Nicaragua. He underlined the difficulties in banning specific pesticides under the Central American Customs Union.

Romeo Quijano, Pesticide Action Network (PAN), presented three case studies applying precautionary approaches to the use of pesticides. He introduced the Community-Based Pesticides Action and Monitoring Project (CPAM), and said that the only way to prevent pesticide pollution is to avoid their use and to practice ecological farming.

Stephen Johnson, Alliance Boots, UK, noted that retailers are very vulnerable to criticism due to their high visibility, and outlined his company's chemicals management and precaution strategy for consumer products. He said retailers also need to consider the perceptions of consumers, NGOs and media, which may not be scientifically based.

Joel Tickner outlined the background paper on tools and approaches for applying precaution in the context of chemicals safety (IFCS/FORUM-V/6 INF), underlining its purpose as a scoping exercise. He reported that, *inter alia*: prevention in developed countries mainly means prevention of chronic or uncertain effects while in developing countries it mostly means prevention of acute events; that precaution is implicit in most chemicals regulations; and that some common challenges include lack of national coordination, resources, information, capacity and tools. He added that there is interest in continuing dialogue on how decision-making under uncertainty can be enhanced.

Discussion on the presentations included: involvement of trade unions and consideration of workers' interests; importance of developing alternatives to toxic chemicals; enforcement of international and national environmental legislation as a tool for applying precaution; weight given to community-based monitoring and research; and how to apply precaution in the absence of information, tools or regulations.

PAN stressed raising awareness of the impacts of chemicals. SENEGAL expressed interest in learning more about risk assessment tools that could be used internationally. NIGERIA urged IFCS to promote capacity-building initiatives in developing countries for applying precaution at the national level. INTERNATIONAL POPS ELIMINATION NETWORK underscored the limitations of risk-assessment models. INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU) noted the limitations of labeling and safety data sheets. CYPRUS, supported by THAILAND and AUSTRIA, proposed the establishment of a working group to elaborate on this issue. ARGENTINA and the US said that it was premature to form a working group. SWITZERLAND suggested that the working group address the needs of developing countries for promoting precaution.

A working group, facilitated by Joel Tickner, was established to develop practical next steps to assist developing countries in their capacity to apply tools and approaches for implementing precaution in chemical safety within their domestic context.

HEAVY METALS: Georg Karlaganis, Switzerland, summarized the side event "Health and environmental concerns associated with heavy metals: global needs for further action?" (IFCS/Forum V/8 INF), which took place on 23 September 2006, in Budapest, Hungary. He highlighted the side event's ideas for addressing the challenges posed by heavy metals, which included a global convention on mercury and other metals, and further work by IFCS on understanding heavy metals and approaches for managing them, and suggested submitting the work to the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM).

DENMARK, with NORWAY, the EC, SWITZERLAND and others emphasized the UNEP Governing Council (GC) as a forum to tackle the mercury challenge. FINLAND hoped that the Forum V outcome on heavy metals will feed back to UNEP, SAICM and the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP) and its Protocol on Heavy Metals. Nigeria, on behalf of the AFRICA REGION, supported by NORWAY, SURINAME, SWITZERLAND, ICFTU and others, proposed the adoption of an IFCS declaration on heavy metals. JAPAN expressed reservations about a declaration. The AFRICA REGION and others suggested establishing a working group to address the heavy metal challenge.

The INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MINING AND METALS (ICMM) favored partnerships as the most effective means to address the issue, while THAILAND suggested applying corporate social responsibility and the "polluter pays" principle. The EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL BUREAU supported global reduction goals for mercury of 50% by 2012, and 70% by 2017, compared to 2005 levels. Iran, for the ASIA PACIFIC REGION, proposed including arsenic and nickel as a priority, and making inventories of all potential sources.

JAPAN said this discussion should be taken under the UNEP framework, and, with the US, noted that IFCS should not prejudice UNEP decisions. TANZANIA supported a globally binding instrument. URUGUAY proposed using the Stockholm Convention to deal with methyl mercury. The US said lead and cadmium do not display the same level of environmental transport as mercury, and are of concern mainly at local and regional levels. The US encouraged other countries and NGOs to participate in partnerships, and with CANADA said it would not support discussions to assess the need for further action. SWEDEN underlined technical and economic alternatives and solutions for immediate action on mercury. SAICM Secretariat clarified that ICCM is the governing body overseeing the implementation of SAICM, and stressed SAICM regional meetings before ICCM-2 as an opportunity to address heavy metals. INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF DOCTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (ISDE) advocated a clean gold initiative and a ban on mercury exports. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) said it has a clear mandate to deal with the hazards of exposure to heavy metals and can take the issue to its executive board. An *ad hoc* working group, chaired by Alo Babajide (Nigeria) was convened.

WIDENING GAP: Sayed Ali Mohammad Mousavi, Iran, presented a progress report from the Forum Standing Committee on "Addressing the widening gap among countries in following chemical safety policies." He reported that as a result of this work, the SAICM Overarching Policy Strategy includes recommendations for facilitating strengthened country capacity building for the sound management of chemicals.

Lilian Corra, ISDE, reported on Monday's side event on South to South cooperation, noting that much useful expertise resides in NGOs and professional associations in developing countries.

WHO said that South to South cooperation often does not occur effectively and suggested that the "gap" is widening further. IRAN noted that the process to address the widening gap cannot rely solely on South to South cooperation, and urged donor countries to take action. TANZANIA noted that donors fund the "best developed proposals," thereby skipping over those most in need of capacity building, and called for a roster of experts to assist those needing help in developing funding proposals. CHINA said that developed countries should not transfer obsolete technologies to developing countries.

THAILAND, supported by NIGERIA, called upon IFCS to provide a platform for developing countries to share expertise and experiences, including networks, databases and rosters of

experts, and suggested an expanded INFOCAP as one potential method. President Wibulpolprasert reported that the SAICM and IFCS Secretariats had met and begun the process of transferring INFOCAP to SAICM.

President Wibulpolprasert proposed, and participants agreed, that discussion on this issue will be summarized in the final report and referred to the Regional Groups, who can feed it into ICCM-2.

AD HOC WORKING GROUPS

FUTURE OF THE IFCS: Chair Karlaganis presented an interim report on "points of commonality" on the future of IFCS, including: the desirability of a forum for "brainstorming" that facilitates a bridge between science and policy; the importance of a flexible, open, multi-sectoral, transparent and inclusive structure; and the need to avoid duplication of functions between IFCS and SAICM. Participants considered a range of position papers and suggestions. While it was agreed that efficient institutional arrangements that maximize synergies and cost effectiveness are desirable, there were differing views on which arrangements would best achieve this. The evening discussion focused on two proposals for compromise text: one maintaining IFCS as a separate institution with tasks including interacting with SAICM and contributing to its implementation; and the other outlining steps towards creating a joint executive body and secretariat for IFCS and SAICM, and leaving open the possibility of dissolving IFCS. Debate continued late into the night with participants discussing text line-by-line.

HEAVY METALS: CANADA, the US and ICMM expressed concerns regarding the accuracy of the Heavy Metals side event report. SWITZERLAND reaffirmed the report's accuracy but said she could receive further comments.

Participants then discussed line-by-line the draft text of a Budapest Declaration on Heavy Metals. JAPAN and the US opposed using "declaration," and CANADA suggested using "recommendation." IRAN proposed using "commitments." BURKINA FASO, SWITZERLAND and DENMARK favored keeping "declaration." CANADA, with ICMM, and opposed by BURKINA FASO, suggested substituting "heavy metals" with "mercury, lead, cadmium and other metals of international concern." In the introductory paragraph, participants agreed to "recognize the environmental and health effects of mercury, lead and cadmium worldwide." The group will continue discussion on the bracketed text.

PRECAUTION: Participants proposed two categories of actions: provision of information including development of a clearing house on tools, case examples, data base and contact points; and capacity building and skill sharing including dialogue on tools, approaches, regulatory frameworks, and training. Chair Tickner agreed to produce a draft paper.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates worked late on Monday and even later Tuesday, with buses scheduled to leave the venue at 11:30 pm. Much talk in the hallways focused on ways in which IFCS could achieve synergies with SAICM, but a few delegates pointed out that SAICM's own arrangements are not yet completed, with one observer warning against "unraveling the (SAICM) sweater before we have even tried it on."

However, some participants drew optimism from delegates' intense efforts to seek solutions rather than simply defending their own positions. Another participant was upbeat that, despite differences on the future of IFCS, progress was being made on other agenda items of Forum V.