

IFCS-V HIGHLIGHTS:

WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2006

On Wednesday, IFCS-V (Forum V) participants met in plenary in the morning, and in working groups during the afternoon and late into the night. In the morning, participants addressed the issues of possible future topics for the Forum, and toys and chemical safety. The working group on heavy metals met at lunchtime and throughout the evening. The working groups on the future of IFCS and on toys and chemical safety met in the afternoon.

FORUM V PLENARY

FUTURE OF THE IFCS: Georg Karlaganis (Switzerland) presented a list of possible future topics for the Forum. President Wibulpolprasert reminded delegates of the resolution adopted by ICCM (SAICM/ICCM.1/7, Annex IV, Resolution I/3), which invites IFCS to discuss issues of common interest and also new and emerging issues. The US and SWITZERLAND cautioned against duplicating the work of other institutions. Chile, on behalf of the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), highlighted the value of IFCS for the exchange of scientific information, best practice and experiences, particularly for developing countries. CHINA said that future Forum meetings should not only discuss controls on chemicals, but should also consider measures for preventing and controlling pollution in the production and use of chemicals.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, JAPAN, TANZANIA, INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU) and TOXICS LINK supported the examination of electronic waste (e-waste), including mobile phone and computer waste. TANZANIA noted that the Basel Convention does not cover imports of used computers not yet considered waste. TOXICS LINK stressed that e-waste affects many of the world's poorest communities.

ISRAEL and TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO suggested examining chemicals in drinking water. FRANCE, NORWAY and PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK (PAN) suggested discussing alternatives and substitute materials for hazardous materials. IRAN called for further information exchange on heavy metals at Forum VI. NORWAY supported continuing the discussions on sound management of chemicals and poverty reduction, and the widening gap among countries.

SWITZERLAND, NORWAY, FRANCE, and INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF DOCTORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (ISDE) supported including nanotechnology as a future topic. NORWAY noted the need to examine how nanoparticles might fit within a regulatory framework, FRANCE

called for examination of nanoparticles' effect on human health and society, and ISDE said preliminary evidence exists of the adverse effects of some nanoparticles on human health. JAPAN considered it premature to consider nanotechnology and nano-products. SENEGAL said that nanotechnology was not beyond the interests of developing countries. OECD reported on an ongoing program to address nanotechnology, including regulatory frameworks, definitions, and testing, and invited contributions from other countries. SWITZERLAND suggested that OECD work be made available to developing countries.

ICFTU said priority should be given to examining topics in the list of activities not agreed for the development of SAICM (referred to by participants as "Table C" from the draft global plan of action SAICM/ICCM.1/4.) JAPAN noted that those items are highly political, and expressed reluctance to undertake such discussions at IFCS. NORWAY agreed on the need to avoid continuing negotiations on Table C within IFCS, suggesting discussion instead focus on "themes" of Table C. FRANCE suggested examining Table C in a "free spirit."

TOYS AND CHEMICAL SAFETY: Katherine Shea, IFCS, highlighted major issues on toys and chemical safety, including: lack of information on toxicity; children's high vulnerability to chemical exposure; and compliance with laws and regulations. She noted that information, prevention and equity are three overarching policy issues, and said that toys are an international commodity. She underscored the importance of measures including, *inter alia*: legislation, toy-specific regulations, enforcement, product liability, voluntary industry standards, product recalls, and labeling.

Ravi Agarwal, Toxics Link, highlighted a recent study on lead and cadmium in soft plastic toys in India. Recognizing the US\$100 billion global toy market, he underlined as major challenges, *inter alia*: the lack of studies on heavy metals in toys in developing countries; the lack of consumer awareness in developing countries; and the uncertainty about the role of cheap imports. Noting that the level of chemical exposure considered "safe" continues to decrease, Agarwal said substitution of dangerous materials is the answer to the problem.

Julio Monreal Urrutia, Ministry of Health, Chile, explained Chile's experience with toys containing toluene, which affected a significant number of children and prompted new regulations on toys and child products in his country. He underscored the lack of specific information at the international level on the effects of toluene on children.

Steve Clarkson, Health Canada, elaborated on Canada's Hazardous Products Act, which deals with toy safety related to toxicity hazards. He underscored, *inter alia*: that the regulation

prevents use of toys with toxic substances that can be ingested, inhaled or absorbed through skin; and that products for children under three years old must meet the same requirements as food packaging products.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICY INSTITUTE (SDPI) asked about regulations for toy disposal. **THAILAND** underscored difficulties in implementing standards for internet toy sales.

MEXICO called for tests to establish the chemical content of toys, and suppression of the illegal toy trade. **ASIA-PACIFIC ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL TOXICOLOGISTS (APAMT)** noted the difficulty of regulating toys produced in “backyard” industries. **HAITI** urged consideration of an international ban on exporting toys containing dangerous chemicals. **INTERNATIONAL POPS ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN)** called for a global market surveillance programme including sampling and public release of information. **THAILAND** called for establishing international monitoring mechanisms and, with **ISRAEL**, advocated a unified and harmonized approach to addressing chemicals in toys. **JAPAN** highlighted domestic legislation and scientific research. Announcing domestic and EU legislation banning certain phthalates, **DENMARK** stressed the need for precaution and the regulation of toys by producer countries, adding that substitution of problematic chemicals could give producers a competitive advantage.

URUGUAY introduced a game developed to raise chemical risk awareness among children. **WHO** said it is revising standards on lead-in-blood concentrations, with new data expected by the end of the year. **IRAN** said that traditional toys are better than electronic games. **CHINA** underscored its National Safety Technical Code for Toys. **ZAMBIA** suggested global action to ban the inclusion of toys in donations. **SDPI** stressed the importance of labeling. **BURUNDI** highlighted children’s exposure to mercury from playing with non-toy products, such as mercury from broken thermometers and used batteries. In summarizing, Shea emphasized the need to focus on precaution, regulation of commerce, and education of producers and children.

A working group lead by Katherine Shea was established to prepare text on the issue.

AD HOC WORKING GROUPS

FUTURE OF THE IFCS: Participants worked on a revised draft text, addressing a number of bracketed sections.

Work on preambular paragraphs included consideration of potential institutional arrangements and use of human and financial resources. **GERMANY** proposed and delegates agreed to insert language on the need to “use human and financial resources efficiently” and “to enhance the implementation of SAICM and to allow the continuation of the important role played by the IFCS”. Text on “avoiding duplication” remained bracketed, as did **JAPAN**’s proposal to “strive to further integration of IFCS into SAICM”, which was opposed by **GRULAC**, **GERMANY** and the **PHILIPPINES**.

The working group agreed on an operative paragraph inviting governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to provide voluntary resources to support the IFCS Secretariat in the fulfillment of its functions.

Bracketed operative paragraphs included two proposals on the possible relationship between IFCS, ICCM and SAICM. The US, opposed by **IPEN**, **UK** and **GERMANY**, advocated inviting ICCM to establish a joint executive body and joint secretariat to implement SAICM and IFCS activities. **IPEN** said that the move would require amendment of the SAICM Overarching

Policy Strategy (OPS). An alternative proposal involved forming a working group composed of the President of IFCS, regional members of the Forum Standing Committee, and stakeholder representatives, to prepare a decision on IFCS’ future role and functions. The matter remained unresolved at the session’s close, and the latest draft text, including brackets, will be considered by regional groups on Thursday.

HEAVY METALS: Participants met in the afternoon and evening and continued discussions line-by-line of the draft version of a statement on mercury, lead and cadmium. After discussions, the group agreed on preambular paragraphs stating that the Forum, *inter alia*: acknowledges the current and planned international actions to promote risk reduction for mercury, lead and cadmium in fora such as UNEP, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), OECD, UNECE, ICCM and WHO; is mindful of ongoing work under the UNEP Mercury Programme; notes that global assessments on cadmium and lead are to be reported to UNEP Governing Council in 2007; and recognizes that current efforts to minimize use and reduce releases of mercury have not yet fully addressed the global risks, and require expansion and adequate support. Participants agreed, after minor amendments, to **FINLAND**’s suggestion to recognize the importance of public awareness, communication, information exchange, capacity building and education at all levels for the implementation of risk reduction measures on mercury, lead and cadmium.

The **AFRICA REGION**, **US** and **CANADA** suggested a range of additions to the draft and discussions continued late into the night.

PRECAUTION: Chair Tickner circulated draft text for consideration by regional groups. The text identifies potential next steps to assist developing countries in their capacity to apply tools and approaches for implementing precaution in chemical safety within their domestic context, including: an information-sharing mechanism featuring a web-portal, a tool-kit, practical case examples, and a list of contact points; and capacity building through joint workshops with other countries or international entities, and an ongoing dialogue for sharing lessons, tools and approaches. The text also considers requesting a feasibility study regarding a plan of action to implement the identified steps.

TOYS AND CHEMICAL SAFETY: The working group met to prepare draft text for consideration by the Forum Standing Committee and regional groups. The working group focused on three main topics: precaution; harmonization of standards; and information sharing, including education. Discussions included: the lack of information on chemical risks of toys and the need to disseminate the “thought starter” paper on toys and chemical safety (IFCS/FORUM-V/03-TS). The group proposed, *inter alia*, that governments, industry and other stakeholders engage in a dialogue to encourage identification of risks, chemicals of concern and possible substitution opportunities. Chair Shea agreed to prepare text reflecting the discussions.

IN THE CORRIDORS

A developing country delegate said that if IFCS is not to “sunset”, it must develop effective tools and approaches that can be used by developing countries to address their chemical challenges. She added that funds and technologies are also essential for the success of the Forum. Noting the informal atmosphere of the Forum, several delegates expressed their satisfaction with the progress of the meeting, envisaging that IFCS can play the role of a bridge between high-level political meetings and technical and scientific workshops, facilitating open dialogue and disseminating information on chemical safety.