

BRS Conventions COPs Highlights: Monday, 28 April 2025

Accordions gleefully sang in the COPs of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions before stark reminders of the scale of the chemicals and waste challenges facing the environment and human health filled the room. The Stockholm Convention (SC) started work on listing chemicals with chlorpyrifos and the Basel Convention (BC) kicked off its substantial work on technical guidelines and legal clarity.

Opening Ceremony

Abiola Olanipekun, BRS Secretariat, invited opening statements.

Nathalie Fontanet, President of the State Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, recalled the BRS Conventions' essential role in protecting health and the environment. In the face of limited resources and "major challenges to multilateralism," she urged participants to work together and strengthen effective institutions.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), underscored that the role of the BRS Conventions is becoming increasingly critical as pollution intensifies. She reported that UNEP projects global municipal solid waste generation will increase from 2.1 billion tonnes in 2023 to 3.8 billion tonnes by 2050, representing another threat to people and the planet.

Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN, reaffirmed FAO's commitment to help countries implement the BRS Conventions, particularly the Rotterdam Convention (RC). She highlighted the challenges that arise when national positions differ and change rapidly, as well as concerns about multilateralism and financing.

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions, congratulated parties for significant achievements since the last COPs, including increased national reporting submission rates. He hailed the USD 206.8 million polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) elimination programme as a "groundbreaking achievement," nonetheless acknowledging the need for USD 18 billion to manage persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

Christine Fuell, Executive Secretary *ad interim* of the RC, underscored the importance of sustainable pesticides management through all stages of the life cycle and the need to promote alternatives to highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), such as agroecology. She highlighted the Global Alliance on

HHPs spearheaded by FAO and stressed that RC listings do not jeopardize the use of pesticides but ensure their environmentally sound and informed use.

Anita Sowińska, BC COP17 President, speaking for the three COP Presidents, highlighted that the BRS Conventions are a cornerstone of international cooperation on chemicals and wastes, and key enablers of global progress on sustainable production and consumption.

Opening of the Meeting

The three COP Presidents opened their respective meetings and welcomed San Marino as a new party to the BC and Belarus as a new party to the RC.

Ghana, for the AFRICAN REGION, lamented the negative impact of e-waste on Africa and called for implementing the Ban Amendment and fostering cooperation between the BC and Bamako Convention, informing that the Region submitted a conference room paper (CRP) on the matter. Calling for sustainable and enhanced financial support through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other mechanisms, they also highlighted the Region's CRP on resource mobilization from non-state actors.

Iran, for the ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, called for: recognizing diverse capacities of developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and providing targeted support; ensuring coherence between the plastics amendment to the BC and the anticipated international legally binding instrument on plastics; supporting the RC Compliance Committee; and strengthening regional centres.

Mexico, for the GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES (GRULAC), highlighted the need for intersessional consultation to unify criteria and enhance coordination among the BRS Convention, and with the Minamata Convention, particularly on challenges related to plastic and e-waste management. They stressed the importance of regional centres and financial and technological support.

Poland, for the EU, Moldova, Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, welcomed guidelines to improve the BC prior informed consent (PIC) procedure and called for the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to include textile waste in its 2026-2027 work programme. They praised the efforts to eliminate PCBs and phase-out dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT). They also expressed grave concern about ongoing armed conflicts, given their impacts on both human life and long-term environmental degradation.

UKRAINE, on behalf of 39 parties, drew attention to the Russian Federation's aggression and its long-term impacts on soil and water contamination with hazardous chemicals across the European region and beyond. They called for an international coordinated response and for upholding the BRS principles in all circumstances.

Exercising its right of reply, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION "categorically rejected accusations," and said that sustainable chemical management "can only be achieved by professional dialogue" and avoiding politicization.

Agendas: The COPs adopted their respective agendas (CHW.17/1; FAO/RC/COP.12/1; POPS/COP.12/1).

Organization of work: The COPs adopted the scenario note (CHW.17/INF/1; FAO/RC/COP.12/INF/1; POPS/COP.12/INF/1) and revised tentative schedule (CHW.17/INF/2/Rev.1; FAO/RC/COP.12/INF/4/Rev.1; POPS/COP.12/INF/4/Rev.1). They also noted the organization of the high-level segment and its thought starter (CHW.17/INF/35, 75; FAO/RC/COP.12/INF/47, 48; POPS/COP.7/INF/67, 68).

Election of Officers: On officers (CHW.17/2; FAO/RC/COP.12/2; POPS/COP.12/2) and overview table of elections (CHW.17/INF/3; FAO/RC/COP.12/INF/4; POPS/COP.12/INF/5), the Secretariat noted that the deadline for nominations from the regions is 1 pm on Tuesday, 6 May. The Bureau will present the nominations on Thursday, 8 May.

Credentials: The Secretariat introduced the status of ratifications (CHW.17/INF/3; FAO/RC/COP.21/INF/3; POPS/COP.12/INF/3) and urged parties to submit their credentials by 10 am on Tuesday, 29 April. The bureau will present its report on credentials on Friday, 2 May.

Stockholm Convention

Listing of Chemicals in Annexes A, B, and/or C:

Chlorpyrifos: The Secretariat introduced the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) recommendation to list chlorpyrifos in Annex A (POPS/COP.12/12) and comments received (INF/27).

Tunisia, for the AFRICAN REGION, as well as PAKISTAN, SERBIA, SWITZERLAND, the EU, MALDIVES, URUGUAY, GUYANA, VENEZUELA, the UK, IRAQ, and NORWAY supported listing chlorpyrifos in Annex A. Some parties requested the following exemptions: CAMEROON for pests, crickets, cotton seeds, and locusts; KENYA for use in veterinarian and termite control applications; ZAMBIA for agriculture and the construction sector to control termites; and URUGUAY for certain specific pests in sugar cane and corn. INDIA opposed the listing, stressing that chlorpyrifos is registered in India, and suggesting that, since there are no alternatives, the listing could impact food security.

MALDIVES requested targeted GEF support for SIDS to strengthen human and technical capacity to tackle POPs, including chlorpyrifos.

INDONESIA, PARAGUAY, CHINA, and SAUDI ARABIA welcomed the POPRC's work and expressed interest in discussing this issue in the contact group, particularly regarding exemptions.

Pointing to severe harmful effects of chlorpyrifos even at very low levels, particularly on infants' brain development and among Arctic ecosystems and communities, the INTERNATIONAL POLLUTION ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN), PESTICIDES ACTION NETWORK (PAN) INTERNATIONAL, PAN INDIA

and PAN ASIA-PACIFIC called for listing it under Annex A with no exemptions, noting viable alternatives exist.

The COP established a contact group on listing, to be co-chaired by Lamin Jaiteh (the Gambia) and Timo Seppälä (Finland).

Measures to Reduce or Eliminate Releases from Wastes:

The Secretariat introduced the report (UNEP/POPS/COP.12/9).

Tunisia, for the AFRICAN REGION, called for technology transfer to African countries and requested the Secretariat provide support and tools for parties.

Saudi Arabia, for the ARAB GROUP, suggested covering a few remaining divergences in the contact group.

BANGLADESH welcomed the technical guidelines on wastes containing POPs and asked for financial and technical support to implement them.

The CHEMICALS AND WASTE YOUTH PLATFORM reported from the first youth forum on chemicals and wastes focused on making the youth work visible in the BRS. They requested that POPs waste guidelines reflect the impact of POPs on children's and youth's health.

The Secretariat will prepare a revised draft decision, accounting for the need to reflect SC decisions on listings and Ethiopia's proposal on UV-328.

Basel Convention

Scientific and Technical Matters: Technical guidelines: The Secretariat introduced the technical guidelines (CHW.17/5).

POPs wastes: The Secretariat introduced the POPs wastes technical guidelines (CHW.17/5/Add.1-4; INF/7-8).

PAKISTAN, ETHIOPIA, BELARUS, the EU, MEXICO, MALAYSIA, and INDONESIA supported the technical guidelines. Kenya, for the AFRICAN REGION, PAKISTAN, MALAYSIA, INDONESIA, IRAN, and VENEZUELA stressed the need for technical and financial assistance to support developing countries in managing POPs wastes.

Kenya, for the AFRICAN REGION, supported by the EU, NORWAY, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, and SAUDI ARABIA, lamented the absence of low-POP content values and called for the establishment of a contact group to address the issue. ARGENTINA drew attention to the provisional definitions of low-POP content, urging delegates to agree on a single figure for each POP and avoid discrepancies with the SC.

IPEN highlighted that combustion-based technologies are inappropriate for dealing with low-POP content waste, as these technologies also generate POPs. They deplored that alternative technologies are not mentioned in the technical guidelines.

The COP established a contact group, co-chaired by Martien Janssen (the Netherlands) and Nawaf Bilasi (Saudi Arabia).

Electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) amendments: The Secretariat introduced the technical guidelines (CHW.17/5/Add.2) and e-waste amendments (CHW.17/10 Add.1).

The COP adopted the decision in part II of CHW.17/5 to extend the expert working group's mandate.

Waste lead-acid batteries and other waste batteries: The Secretariat introduced additional information on technical guidelines on lead-acid batteries (CHW.17/INF/76) and other waste batteries (INF/9).

BANGLADESH supported the proposal to recognize these products as hazardous waste. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO called to extend the small intersessional working group's mandate.

NORWAY highlighted the importance of lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles, significantly increasing projections of the volume of battery wastes.

The EU welcomed the revised draft. They stressed that the chapter on health and safety should be reviewed, while the chapter on repair and repurpose should be maintained.

The BASEL ACTION NETWORK (BAN) urged parties to “do everything to prevent a tsunami of such waste to developing countries” and to clarify when a degraded battery becomes waste. They called for the classification of lithium batteries as A1181 (hazardous e-waste), or at least Y49 (non-hazardous e-waste).

PESTICIDE ACTION NEXUS ASSOCIATION ETHIOPIA emphasized that each year, an estimated 1.5 million people die from lead poisoning, with children being the most exposed group. They called for strengthening industry standards, empowering civil society, and adopting a zero-tolerance policy for polluting recyclers.

The COP tasked the contact group on technical matters established earlier to look further into the battery-related documents.

Mercury: The Secretariat reported that the Minamata Convention established a mercury waste threshold of 15mg/kg total concentration of mercury. The COP adopted the decision in part IV of CHW.17/5 to update the mercury waste technical guidelines to reflect the Minamata Convention’s decision on minimum thresholds.

Pneumatic tyres: The EU stressed the need to keep guidance on repair and retreading operations.

IPEN characterized the proposed guidelines as inadequate, arguing, among others, that pyrolysis-based recycling is not environmentally sound management (ESM).

The WORLD BUSINESS COUNCIL ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT urged including advanced pyrolysis and chemical recycling in the guidelines, as they provide “a wide range of high-value materials not obtained from mechanical recycling processes.”

BRAZIL emphasized that used tyres destined for export should be classified as waste and subject to the PIC procedure, given the significant environmental and health risks associated with their improper transport and disposal.

The technical matters contact group will take up the issue.

Hazardous waste physico-chemical treatment (D9) and biological treatment (D8): The COP agreed to discuss this issue at COP18.

Plastic wastes: The Secretariat reported on technical assistance activities to support parties in using and testing these technical guidelines. The COP took note of the information provided.

Rubber wastes: The COP agreed to discuss whether to develop technical guidelines on rubber wastes at COP18.

Further Legal Clarity: Artak Khachatryan (Armenia), Co-Chair of the expert working group on the review of annexes, presented on the outcomes of the intersessional work, focusing on possible amendments to Annex IV. He highlighted a lack of consensus on “recycling” and/or “reclamation” operations, and explained bracketed options throughout the section. He also noted a lack of consensus on including open burning as a disposal operation, on which BANGLADESH and KENYA expressed concerns in plenary.

Parties debated the scope of work on this issue, and for the contact group. The UK and NEW ZEALAND urged discussing all proposed amendments in their entirety. CHINA noted that these issues are related to the definition of waste under the BC. The EU suggested that the contact group deliberates only on Annex IV. SWITZERLAND suggested adopting aspects where the working group has reached consensus, and, with ARGENTINA, that the contact group should focus on the remaining brackets. JAPAN recognized that the brackets in Annex IV reflect differences among countries’ practices, suggesting that proposed revisions benefit a wide range of countries. NIGERIA suggested that the expert working group continue work and defer the item to COP18.

IRAQ and KENYA questioned the legally binding nature of the amendments, which could require changes to national legislation and thus result in delays in implementation. BRAZIL stressed the need to consider different parties’ specific legal needs and circumstances.

On preparing for re-use (R14) operations, SINGAPORE stated that wording should not impede the flow of equipment for repair. The US and the INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY COUNCIL (ITI) expressed concern that including these “preparing for re-use” operations could lead to the misclassification of products, affecting legitimate trade and investment in re-use, and cautioned against open-ended catch-all recovery operations, which could reduce the PIC procedure’s legal clarity and efficiency.

BAN urged parties to close a “major loophole” in the BC by ensuring that broken equipment is considered waste until repaired.

The PHILIPPINES welcomed amending Annex IV and supported proposals to update information systems and notification processes. VANUATU underscored capacity building and technical support for SIDS to address transparency issues that might arise from the amendments. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for clarity on operations, stating it will strengthen enforcement.

A contact group, co-chaired by Perine Nkosi Kasonde (Zambia) and Jason Dunn (Australia), was established to continue discussions with a focus on Annex IV.

In the Corridors

Like the accordions that welcomed delegates, the agendas of the Stockholm and Basel Convention COPs quickly unfolded on TripleCOP’s first day. Many participants’ expectations seemed tempered—some hinted at “challenging geopolitics,” and others referenced the triple planetary crisis and grim forecasts. An observer noted the “quickly drawn line,” with economic and food security needs for chlorpyrifos on one side and health and environmental protection on the other.

The technical guidelines stretched out for the afternoon. From e-waste to batteries, and mercury to tyres, there’s clearly an increasing need for technical expertise. “As usual,” one remarked, “we’ll be seeing a lot of each other during this meeting.” There were some hopes that low-POP content could finally be resolved in the POPs waste technical guidelines, solving a long-standing quagmire. Meanwhile, other waste streams will have to wait for the next COP due to the high workload.

The plenary swelled. Not all observers could be allocated seats, showing the growing interest in chemicals and wastes. For the first time, a youth forum met before the TripleCOP and reminded the plenary of the long-lasting effects their decisions here will have for future generations.

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Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions**



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