

BRS Conventions COPs Highlights: Wednesday, 30 April 2025

The High-Level Segment officially kicked off in the afternoon plenary, followed by the ministerial roundtable discussions. The Stockholm Convention (SC) had opened all agenda items, with contact groups working full steam on their respective work streams, and the Basel Convention (BC) continued its technical and legal work. The [meeting documents](#) can be found on the BRS website.

High-Level Segment

Katrin Schneeberger, State Secretary, Federal Office for the Environment of Switzerland, highlighted that chemicals, though invisible to the naked eye, are a tangible reality. She called for continuing to make the BRS Conventions “living, ambitious, and forward-looking instruments.” She praised the synergies among the three Conventions as a “major asset” while acknowledging their deep connection with ongoing negotiations for a legally binding instrument on plastics.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), reminded that “when waste is not managed in an environmentally sound manner, people and the planet pay the price.” She stressed that solutions arise from multilateral environmental agreements, such as the BRS Conventions. She urged countries to: strengthen action to prevent hazardous chemical and waste exposure; invite industry to develop safe and green chemicals; incentivize circular markets; and create an appropriate fiscal environment for reducing chemicals and waste while leveraging finance from other sectors, such as insurance companies and banks.

Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), underscored agriculture’s potential for transformative sustainable change that delivers food security without jeopardizing the health of humans and the environment. She stressed the need for integrated, cross-sectoral solutions and collaboration, emphasizing that “farmers need to be at the table.”

Hammad Shamimi, Rotterdam Convention (RC) COP President, highlighted growing global awareness of the unsustainable production and use of hazardous chemical waste affecting the most vulnerable populations. He said that the BRS Conventions are essential to address pollution at its source and to drive circularity, and called for implementation to be strengthened, ensuring financial and technical assistance to those countries that need it most.

Juergen Voegelé, Vice President for Sustainable Development, World Bank, lamented that development finance neglects chemical and waste issues. Citing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) liquids, he observed examples of good practices, but said not enough is known about the financing models to scale these up. He stressed the need to deal with emerging threats and understand the impacts of innovative chemistry, because “cleaning up is not enough.”

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the BRS Conventions, traced a “vicious circle” where hazardous chemicals and wastes

drive climate change and biodiversity loss, which then amplify releases of dangerous substances. Saying their work is more urgent than ever, he invited ministers to engage in roundtables on pollution, circularity, and means of implementation.

Joint Sessions

International cooperation and coordination: Cooperation with the Minamata Convention on Mercury: The Secretariat introduced the reports on cooperation (CHW.17/21, INF/54; RC/COP.12/20, INF/25; POPS/COP.12/23, INF/44). The MINAMATA CONVENTION reported on decisions to enhance cooperation and on the adoption of mercury waste thresholds. The COPs adopted a joint decision pending confirmation of budgetary implications.

Cooperation with other organizations: The Secretariat introduced the note and draft decision (CHW.17/22; RC/COP.12/21; POPS/COP.12/24) and report on activities and programmatic cooperation (CHW.17/INF/55, 56; RC/COP.12/INF/26, 27; POPS/COP.12/INF/45, 46). Additional reports and updates outline how the BRS Conventions can contribute to other agreements and ongoing negotiations. They noted a document on shipbreaking from the International Maritime Organization (IMO) relevant to the BC (CHW.17/INF/60) and on cooperation with the World Customs Organization relevant to the RC (RC/COP.12/INF/34).

On climate change, SAUDI ARABIA, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, called for deleting the paragraph in the draft decision that encourages parties to consider including waste management in their nationally determined contributions, saying this counters the nationally determined nature of the Paris Agreement.

On plastics, the EU, SWITZERLAND, and others welcomed value of the BRS Secretariat’s expertise to the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC). SAUDI ARABIA requested the deletion of the paragraph in the draft decision related to continuing BRS information provision. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION underlined that the INC’s mandate does not include chemicals.

On the Hong Kong Convention, NORWAY, the EU, SINGAPORE, and JAPAN welcomed the IMO’s provisional guidance on its interplay with the BC. They stressed the need for legal clarity because the Hong Kong Convention provides a legal framework for ship recycling, while ships could be hazardous waste under the BC. The BALTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MARITIME COUNCIL (BIMCO) urged legal clarity because ships following one convention could be found breaching the other.

BANGLADESH suggested that the Hong Kong Convention does not provide an equivalent level of protection as the BC, and worried that the shipping sector could exploit loopholes. The NGO SHIPBREAKING PLATFORM stressed that the Hong Kong Convention will allow companies to avoid the true cost of sustainable ship recycling. The BASEL ACTION NETWORK (BAN) observed the oddity of the IMO requesting BC parties to ignore their BC obligations.

The GAMBIA, for CONGO, MALI, MAURITIUS, and ZAMBIA, introduced a CRP on cooperation, coordination, and

resource mobilization with and for the Bamako Convention. The CHILDREN AND YOUTH PLATFORM urged delegates to make visible “wasted time, wasted resources, and wasted youth due to exposure to chemicals and wastes” and stressed the need to truly work in synergies to protect youth.

A contact group, co-chaired by Ole Thomas Thommesen (Norway) and Artak Khachatryan (Armenia), will discuss the draft decision and the CRP.

Stockholm Convention

Measures to reduce or eliminate releases from intentional production and use: Exemptions: The Secretariat introduced the documents (POPS/COP.12/4 and INF/7/Rev.1), noting a request by the Republic of Korea for an extension of the specific exemption for the use of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), its salts, and related compounds for fire-fighting foam for liquid fuel vapor suppression and liquid fuel fires (Class B fires) in installed systems, including both mobile and fixed systems. The specific exemption is set to expire on 2 June 2026.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA explained its request for a five-year extension, pointing to remaining stocks and the implementation of replacement plans for these fire-fighting foams. They said that if replacement was completed earlier they would withdraw their extension request, and called for information sharing among parties with similar problems.

The EU supported the proposal for use in installed systems but called for the extension to be as narrow as possible. BANGLADESH, KYRGYZSTAN, the UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA (UFU), the ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (ESDO), the INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANTS ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN), CHILDREN AND YOUTH INTERNATIONAL, and the INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL (ICC), objected to the extension noting the severe, long-lasting and far-ranging impacts of these POPs and the readily available safe alternatives. Speaking for over half a million firefighters from various countries, UFU referred to the demoralizing experience of having to yet again advocate for firefighters’ safety in the face of a request for “another five years of poisoning,” also questioning these foams’ effectiveness given their age. ICC noted that they heavily rely on the SC for protection, adding that “Inuit peoples should not have to pay the price.”

Parties agreed to the draft decision with the exception of bracketed text on whether to grant the exemption, and to continue discussions on this in the contact group on Listings.

Brominated diphenyl ethers (BDEs): The Secretariat presented the documents addressing the evaluation and review of BDEs (UNEP/POPS/COP.12/7 and UNEP/POPS/COP.12/INF/13).

The EU supported the draft decision but called for added language encouraging parties to reevaluate their continued use of the BDEs registration and to make the resulting information available to the Secretariat.

Drawing attention to the significant challenges faced by developing countries in identifying these POPs, COLOMBIA recounted the experience of information sharing amongst the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP of countries (GRULAC), and asked that the recommendation to share experience in managing recycled plastics and wastes containing BDEs (paragraph 112 of POPS/COP.12/INF/13) be included in the draft decision.

The Secretariat will prepare a revised draft decision to be considered by plenary.

DDT: The COP considered a draft decision (POPS/COP.12/5) on the evaluation of the continued need for dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) for disease vector control and the promotion of alternatives to DDT. The decision recognized “a continued need for the use of DDT for malaria vector control justified only in a few specific settings.”

UNEP introduced its report on the implementation of the road map for the development of alternatives to DDT (POPS/COP.12/INF/9). They stressed that the absence of new financial contributions dedicated to the road map constrains ability to act, and called for additional financial resources.

Zambia, for the AFRICAN REGION, underscored that several African countries continue to use DDT as part of their disease vector control strategy, especially for malaria, and are not in a position to phase out DDT by 2025.

The EU and SERBIA supported the draft decision. The EU urged the industry sector to develop alternatives for malaria.

SERBIA, ERITREA, and ETHIOPIA noted progress made domestically in the phase out of DDT, while calling for additional funding for developing countries.

SOUTH AFRICA and BOTSWANA called for exemptions until viable alternatives are operationalized.

BRAZIL reported having found alternatives for malaria and said there is no need for ongoing use.

INDIA reported that it stopped DDT production in 2023-2024 and now only exports DDT to fulfill requirements from other countries.

MALDIVES explained it prohibited the use of DDT in the 1990s and identified viable alternatives.

ESDO and IPEN reminded that DDT was listed in Annex B of the SC in 2001 and argued that, although used for disease control, DDT remains a public health concern. The PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK (PAN) INTERNATIONAL and PAN INDIA argued that the need for information, research, and funding on nonchemical alternatives is greater than ever.

The COP adopted the proposed draft decision, pending confirmation from the budget group.

PCBs: The COP considered a draft decision (POPS/COP.12/6) on the elimination of PCBs.

COLOMBIA, MOLDOVA, SOUTH AFRICA, BRAZIL, SRI LANKA, VENEZUELA, UZBEKISTAN, TAJIKISTAN, SENEGAL, MOROCCO, and IRAQ reported on progress made domestically.

KAZAKHSTAN, BELARUS, TAJIKISTAN, MALI, IRAQ, INDIA, REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, and the SC REGIONAL CENTRE FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE expressed serious concerns and asked for extending the deadlines for eliminating the use of PCBs in equipment by 2025 and ensuring the environmentally sound waste management of liquids containing PCBs and PCB-contaminated equipment by 2028.

Zambia, for the AFRICAN REGION, highlighted the inadequate infrastructure and insufficient financial resources in African countries making the identification and inventories of equipment containing PCB particularly challenging. They called on parties to “intensify support in line with the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.”

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION urged the Secretariat to develop guidelines to assess the hazardous properties and set low content values of PCBs. They asked to establish a contact group on the matter.

UNEP deplored the lack of new financial contributions on PCBs since 2013 and called for urgent support.

The WORLD BANK emphasized the PCB elimination programme approved by the GEF, which “remains open to additional countries.”

ESDO urged all parties to meet the 2025 and 2028 goals.

IPEN referred to studies showing that only 20% of PCB stockpiles have been destroyed, despite the 2028 deadline.

The COP adopted the draft decision as proposed, pending confirmation from the budget group.

Measures to reduce or eliminate releases from unintentional production: The Secretariat introduced the documents, including on guidelines and guidance on best available techniques (BAT) and best environmental practices (BEP) for measures to reduce

or eliminate releases from unintentional production (POPS/COP.12/8) and the joint toolkit (INF/15).

ZAMBIA, for the AFRICAN REGION, welcomed the proposal, underscored the importance of awareness raising and technical assistance activities to promote the effective use of the toolkit and the guidance, and stressed the need for financial support.

The EU emphasized the importance of the BAT/BEP guidelines and guidance for the effective implementation of the SC, while SRI LANKA highlighted its efforts to eliminate unintentionally-produced POPs in accordance with SC.

IPEN drew attention to its creation of a world map with an overview of more than 70 contaminated sites, and encouraged parties to use the BAT/BEP guidance.

Parties adopted the draft decision with a small amendment on areas of work to include consideration of UV-328, pending budget confirmation.

National Implementation Plans (NIPs): The Secretariat introduced the documents (POPS/COP.12/10/Rev.1 and UNEP/POPS/COP.12/INF/19), noting the very high transmission rate (up to 95%) of initial NIPs but the drop in rates for updated ones.

KENYA elaborated on its work with UNEP and the SC Regional Centre for Africa on NIP updating. The EU and CAMEROON thanked UNEP for its support and UNITAR for their online course on NIPs preparation, reviewing, and updating.

BRAZIL emphasized the need for continued support for NIPs' preparation and update, noting these are highly dependent on adequate means of implementation, and called on developed Parties to comply with their SC commitments.

TANZANIA highlighted the need for further technical assistance on inventory updates, laboratory capacity development and contaminated site management, while VENEZUELA drew attention to capacity-building challenges regarding management of inventories and gathering and analyzing data.

Discussions will continue Thursday, 1 May in the afternoon.

Contact Groups

BC Legal: Discussions focused on Annex IV amendments, co-chaired by Perine Nkosi Kasonde (Zambia) and Jason Dunn (Australia).

Participants considered the package of proposed disposal and recovery operations related to open burning, particularly whether to include open burning as an example of a thermal treatment on land and at sea (D10 and D11, respectively) or list a separate operation for open burning (D17). Proponents of using D10 and D11 noted that the technical guidelines distinguish types of thermal reactions and set out the allowable temperatures that qualify as environmentally sound management (ESM). Citing plastics as one example, those favoring a separate D17 operation stressed that it must be listed separately to enable countries to enforce the illegal trafficking of wastes that are later openly burned. They said using the D10 and D11 operations for open burning could mean it is "masked as an ESM operation."

Delegates finished the first read-through on recovery, and possibly recycling and reclamation operations. Some countries stressed the value of keeping R12 (exchange of wastes for submission to any of the existing recovery operations) because importers and exporters commonly use it. For others, this significant usage indicated that actors use it as a "catch-all" and called for clarifying this operation.

On preparing for re-use, participants debated if items under warranty should be excluded. Using various examples of e-waste, it was argued that this code is intended for waste shipments in which some items could be repaired, whereas items under warranty are not waste.

Financial Resources: In the morning, discussions focused on the second and third reads of the decision on the financial mechanism, co-chaired by Toks Akinseye (the UK) and David

Kapindula (Zambia). Parties' views diverged on how to best reflect differentiated obligations on implementation by developing countries and on funding obligations by developed countries. Additionally, some concerns were expressed about recommending the GEF to prioritize newly listed industrial POPs – several parties noted that all POPs should be treated equally, whether legacy or newly listed. While reviewing the section on the assessment of funding needs, one party raised a point of order, after the Co-Chairs explained that their proposal cannot be added to the text since initial views were collected during the first read. Following deliberations, a compromise was found to include the proposed text and have a small meeting of interested parties discuss the paragraph in question to find a way forward.

SC Listings: Co-chaired by Timo Seppälä (Finland) and Lamin Jaiteh (the Gambia), the contact group discussed exemptions proposed by parties in addition to those suggested by POPs Review Committee (POPRC) on medium-chained chlorinated paraffins. Delegates agreed to add flexible elastomeric foam for thermal insulation and polysulfide sealant used in sealing for doors and windows to the list of exemptions. Yet to be decided exemptions include: for uses in pyrotechnic defense devices; paints and coatings for space and defense equipment; and fatliquoring in leather, among others. Substantial debates revolved around a proposed exemption on polyvinyl chloride (PVC) applications in construction, with some parties concerned it is too broad, given that POPRC only recommended exemption for wires and cables in the construction sector. Discussions continued in the evening on the provisions regarding the requirement for producers to disclose the information.

BC Technical Matters: Co-chaired by Nawaf Bilasi (Saudi Arabia) and Martien Janssen (the Netherlands), discussions continued on the draft technical guidelines on the ESM of waste batteries other than waste lead-acid batteries (UNEP/CHW.17/INF/9), and the draft technical guidelines on the ESM of waste lead-acid batteries (WLABs) (UNEP/CHW.17/INF/76). Delegates managed to remove some brackets in both documents, including some on life-cycle management of WLABs, but agreed to leave some sections in brackets for small interessional working group (SIWG) consideration. The group also agreed to the text proposed by the UK on electrolyte health and safety. There was an exchange of views on disposal of WLABs in specially engineered landfills, possibly as a transitory option, with brackets remaining in the text, and on the distinction between smelting and melting. The group agreed to the draft decision text on forwarding the guidelines to the SIWG.

In the corridors

The red carpet rolled out for 77 ministers gracing the BRS COPs with their political guidance and attention. For many, it was a chance to raise the profile of chemical and waste pollution internationally, and back at home where climate change tends to dominate domestic agendas.

The "ecosystem" of international organizations and agreements relevant to the chemicals and wastes agenda also continues to grow. How to cooperate and coordinate with these treaties took up the afternoon. As one negotiator put it "each has their own approach and ways of doing things, of working together, which we don't really have experience with." Indeed, references to plastics and climate change proved thorny.

But shipbreaking was the main stumbling block. The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Hong Kong Convention soon enters into force, layering another legal framework for ship recycling atop the BC's decisions on this issue. "It was a long, hard, confusing negotiation here," a veteran negotiator recalled of the BC process, while a newer negotiator worried that the IMO rules could lead to "toxic ships dumped on our beaches."

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