

IFCS VI HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2008

The sixth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS Forum VI) continued on Wednesday morning with a plenary session on substitution and alternatives. In the afternoon, the plenary discussed international transport of lead and cadmium via trade. In the evening, three working groups and a drafting group met to discuss: the future of the IFCS; nanotechnology; lead and cadmium; and substitution.

IFCS PLENARY

In the morning plenary, Chair Karlaganis reported progress made in the nanotechnology working group, including agreement to change the text's title from "declaration" to "statement," and to narrow its scope to manufactured nanomaterials.

IFCS Vice-President Katima reported on the working group on the future of the IFCS, noting agreement on the IFCS's three functions. He reported divergence over the options and said regional and bilateral consultations would be held throughout the day.

IFCS Regional Vice-Presidents reported on group discussions. The ASIA PACIFIC GROUP and AFRICAN GROUP endorsed the first option, supporting preservation of the independent status of the IFCS. The ASIA PACIFIC GROUP said step-by-step integration of the IFCS into the ICCM should be further discussed and that an interim period could lead to the return of the traditional donors. CEE supported the third option of making the IFCS a subsidiary body of the ICCM, but stressed the necessity of maintaining the Forum's independence, which allows for flexibility in the agenda. WEOG expressed commitment to finding a solution to best fulfill the IFCS's agreed functions.

SUBSTITUTION AND ALTERNATIVES: On Wednesday morning, delegates convened in a plenary session on substitution and alternatives, facilitated by Michael Wittmann, Austria, who presented the "thought starter" (IFCS/FORUM-VI/02.TS) and the Secretariat's compilation of relevant international agreements (IFCS/FORUM-VI/8.INF).

Ken Geiser, University of Massachusetts Lowell, proposed six steps for good substitution strategies, namely: improved methods and procedures; better scientific information; creation of a substitute database; integration of substitution processes into comprehensive chemicals management; involvement of all stakeholders; and capacity building.

Lothar Lißner, Cooperation Centre Hamburg, highlighted the principle of substitution under European law. He stated, however, that most companies are not following the rules, and identified uncertainty as one of the main barriers to substitution due to often incomplete information on substitutes.

Richard Kiaka, iLima, discussed challenges facing developing countries in implementing substitution strategies, highlighting: weaker capacity in research and development; limited public awareness and financial capacity; and economic investment that favors established industries.

Jorge Perez, National Cleaner Production Center of Mexico, explained how the chemical leasing business model can increase substitution of hazardous chemicals and reduce consumption of raw materials. He emphasized that it aligns producer and user interests by compelling them to share responsibility for use of chemicals to improve both profits and environmental sustainability.

Dolores Romano, Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud (ISTAS), said companies and workers are often unaware of the chemical ingredients in the products they use, and that ISTAS has, *inter alia*, organized training courses and created a database on health and environmental risks of chemicals and substitution.

Michael Streek, Schülke & Mayr GmbH, a manufacturer of disinfectants stressed the importance of application and customer support. He outlined a two-year project where his company is taking responsibility for hygiene conditions in a German hospital.

Jorge Méndez-Galvan, Mexico, discussed phasing out DDT through his country's malaria control programme. He recommended eliminating conditions and sites that breed mosquitoes through, *inter alia*, improving hygiene, sweeping patios, cutting vegetation and using bednets. He stressed community participation, ecological management and improving living standards in fighting malaria without insecticides.

TANZANIA called upon the WHO to disseminate information on malaria vector control without DDT, while the ISDE stated that Mexico's experience was not fully understood or ready for dissemination.

Joel Tickner, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, discussed challenges of substitution and tools needed to support implementation and innovation, including identifying substances of greatest concern and utilizing alternatives. He emphasized the need for a comprehensive information framework to make decisions that improve safety.

NIGERIA, supported by TOXIC LINK, urged delegates to consider the issue of eliminating lead in paints, noting that feasible alternatives are available. TOXIC LINK also highlighted the need to consider the cost of inaction.

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT OF LEAD AND CADMIUM VIA TRADE: In the afternoon, delegates convened in a plenary session on international transport of lead and cadmium via trade, facilitated by Reiner Arndt, Germany.

Georg Karlaganis, Switzerland, discussed the Budapest Conference on Heavy Metals, which found that trade in products containing lead and cadmium is the main route of dispersal of these heavy metals, which increases environmental and health risks, especially for infants and pregnant women.

Trade Related Dispersal of Lead and Cadmium: Erika Rosenthal, CIEL, discussed the “thought starter” (IFCS/FORUM-VI/03.TS), explaining that it identifies risks to human health and the environment that may be directly traced to international trade in lead and cadmium commodities, compounds, products and wastes, and suggested discussing whether such risks constitute an “international concern” warranting a coordinated international approach. CHINA raised reservations about the use of data from media sources in the “thought starter.”

Brian Wilson, International Lead Management Centre, discussed lessons learned from lead risk management, noting the importance of, *inter alia*: project partnerships with governmental, nongovernmental and private sector organizations; clearly defined responsibilities and project ownership; a multistakeholder approach to implementation; and realistic objectives.

Patrick de Metz, International Cadmium Association, outlined the main cadmium sources, and said 70% of cadmium produced is used for rechargeable consumer batteries. He discussed cadmium releases into water, air and soil, and human uptake, and stated that when reviewing scientific data, the argument that trade in products containing lead and cadmium presents an unacceptable risk to health and environment cannot be sustained.

Ravi Agarwal, Toxics Link, discussed global transport of lead and cadmium through trade in e-waste such as computers and mobile phones. He said products are manufactured, assembled and marketed globally but often disposed of in developing countries, which are also most affected by exposure, in part because much of the recycling is done by hand by the urban poor.

Kaj Madsen, UNEP, and Anne Nkwimba Magashi, African Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production, presented a study on the effects of trade in lead, cadmium and mercury on human health and the environment in Africa. They said that Africa is becoming a “dumping place” for waste and noted several studies which found high levels of chemicals in children.

Experiences and Case Studies: Joel Tickner, University of Massachusetts Lowell, discussed concerns about toxic substances in consumer products, including toys. He said national and international policies are disjointed and uncoordinated, stated that the US regulatory framework is burdensome and does not result in a high standard of protection, and identified the need for better national and global measures.

Michael Musenga, Zambia, outlined efforts to reduce heavy metal exposure in Zambia. He highlighted the development of national minimum standards and efforts towards harmonization and implementation. He identified challenges, including lack of: coordinated enforcement; capacity; and adequate testing facilities.

Perry Gottesfeld, OK International, emphasized the need to complement national collection systems for lead batteries with certification schemes in order to address the increasing problem of lead poisoning in developing countries. Warning that growing international trade in lead batteries may limit the possibility of introducing producer responsibility initiatives, he suggested that any solution will require greater international cooperation

Ibrahim Shafii, Basel Convention Secretariat, explained how the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal engages with lead and cadmium including through: guidelines on

environmentally sound management of batteries; technical and emergency assistance and capacity building; and emerging initiatives on e-waste.

Jaime Delgado Zegarra, Peruvian Association of Consumers Unions, highlighted concerns over the presence of lead in toys and pencils, discussed health problems associated with the production and export of lead, and identified illegal recycling of batteries as a notable problem in Latin America.

During the discussion, participants addressed, *inter alia*: lithium batteries; ways to improve testing capacity for heavy metals; and early enforcement of trade bans. NIGERIA called for a statement on lead and cadmium to be forwarded to the UNEP Governing Council and ICCM2.

Arndt identified the need to consider whether trade in lead and cadmium poses unacceptable risks to human health and the environment, and if so, the need to discuss questions of responsibility and remedy.

WORKING GROUPS

FUTURE OF THE IFCS: The working group on the future of the IFCS reconvened in an evening session. Based on informal discussions held throughout the day, some regional groups said they could consider the third option as a basis for discussion on the condition that elements safeguarding the integrity of the Forum were incorporated. Delegates debated whether to discuss a draft decision proposed by one group or to further discuss which elements should be included before drafting a decision. Deliberations continued late into the evening.

NANOTECHNOLOGY: The working group on nanotechnology reconvened on Wednesday evening and delegates agreed to use the draft statement produced on Tuesday as the basis for further discussion. The initial debate revealed, however, that some issues had not yet been resolved, including whether the statement was to address both nanotechnology and manufactured nanomaterials or the latter only. Discussions continued late into the evening.

LEAD AND CADMIUM: The working group on lead and cadmium chaired by Reiner Arndt, Germany, convened in an evening session. Delegates began the session by considering whether these chemicals pose unacceptable risks to human health and the environment, initially focusing on waste disposal in developing countries. Deliberations continued late into the evening.

SUBSTITUTION: Chaired by Michael Wittmann, Austria, the drafting group on substitution and alternatives met in the evening to discuss the draft Dakar recommendations on substitution and alternatives. Delegates made comments and proposed amendments to the draft text. Discussions continued late into the evening.

IN THE CORRIDORS

After a full day in plenary, some delegates left the discussions on international transport of lead and cadmium with mixed feelings. Some developing country delegates were doubtful that the issue would be given high priority in the near future since the worst effects are felt mostly in developing countries. Others were hopeful that the IFCS would agree on a statement that builds on the Budapest Statement on Mercury, Lead and Cadmium, and felt that it was significant that the IFCS has raised the issue of international trade in the context of heavy metals. Some also predicted that regardless of the future of the IFCS, the lead and cadmium issue will remain on the international agenda.

Late in the evening, the corridors of the Meridien remained busy with delegates emerging from regional meetings and disappearing into the working groups. While some groups seemed satisfied with their progress, others were starting to feel frustrated over the slow pace of discussions.