



**Stockholm Convention
on Persistent Organic
Pollutants**

Original: English

**Conference of the Parties of the Stockholm
Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
Fourth meeting**

Geneva, 4–8 May 2009

Item 5 (f) of the provisional agenda*

**Matters for consideration or action by the Conference of the Parties:
information exchange**

**Proposal by the Secretariat on the possible role of the
clearing-house mechanism at the national and regional levels**

Note by the Secretariat

Introduction

1. Article 9 of the Stockholm Convention states that each Party shall facilitate or undertake the exchange of information on the reduction or elimination of the production, use and release of persistent organic pollutants and on alternatives to persistent organic pollutants, including information relating to their risks and their economic and social costs.
2. Paragraph 2 of Article 9 states that the Parties shall exchange the information referred to in the first paragraph of that article either directly or through the Secretariat. Paragraph 4 states that the Secretariat shall serve as a clearing-house mechanism for information on persistent organic pollutants, including information provided by Parties, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.
3. The Conference of the Parties in paragraph 3 of its decision SC-3/10 recommended that the Secretariat, Parties and other interested stakeholders use the draft strategic plan prepared by the Secretariat and presented to the Conference of the Parties at its third meeting in document UNEP/POPS/COP.3/INF/9 for the further development of information-exchange activities and projects pursuant to Article 9 of the Convention.
4. In paragraph 4 of decision SC-3/10 the Conference of the Parties also requested the Secretariat, in further developing the clearing-house mechanism, to take full account of the discussions that were then under way in the ad hoc joint working group on enhancing cooperation and coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions.

* UNEP/POPS/COP.4/1.

5. In paragraph 7 of decision SC-3/10 the Conference of the Parties requested the Secretariat to prepare a proposal for discussion by the Conference of the Parties at its fourth meeting on the possible role of the clearing-house mechanism at the national and regional levels, taking into account the terms of reference for regional and subregional centres, relevant decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties and the goal of promoting synergies with the Rotterdam and Basel Conventions. The proposal requested by the Conference of the Parties is set out in the present note.

I. Relevant issues from the terms of reference for regional and subregional centres

6. The terms of reference¹ for the Stockholm Convention regional and subregional centres encourage the centres to exchange information on persistent organic pollutants through the clearing-house mechanism referred to in paragraph 4 of Article 9 of the Convention and to promote awareness-raising and information-dissemination programmes, including programmes for the general public, on issues related to the Convention.² The Conference of the Parties is to provide regional and subregional centres with specific guidance relating to their activities and mode of operation.³

II. Relevant recommendations of the Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

7. The Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions adopted a recommendation on enhancing cooperation and coordination among the three conventions. Through this recommendation the Working Group invited Parties to consider establishing common websites and documentation centres at the national and, where appropriate, regional levels, containing available information on human health and environmental impacts relevant to the three conventions. It also requested the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions to develop systems for information exchange on health and environmental impacts, including a clearing-house mechanism, with the aim of these systems serving all three conventions.⁴

8. The Ad Hoc Joint Working Group also invited Parties to establish or strengthen national processes or mechanisms for coordinating activities of the focal points and designated national authorities for the three conventions, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and other relevant policy frameworks and to provide models of such coordination mechanisms as well as examples of good coordination practices from countries through joint information services for the three conventions.⁵

9. The Working Group also requested the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, in cooperation with relevant intergovernmental bodies such as the member organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and regional centres, to collaborate on the dissemination of good practices and, if necessary, the elaboration of guidance and training in the following areas:⁶

- “(a) Protection of human health and the environment from the harmful impacts or adverse effects of hazardous chemicals and wastes;
- (b) Prevention of accidents and emergency response in case of accidents;
- (c) Combating illegal traffic and trade in hazardous chemicals and wastes;
- (d) Information generation and access;

1 Decision SC-2/9.

2 Decision SC-1/15, subparagraph 10 (k).

3 Decision SC-2/9, annex I, paragraph 25.

4 Report of the Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions on the work of its third meeting (UNEP/FAO/CHW/RC/POPS/JWG.3/3), annex I, subparagraphs (aa) and (bb).

5 Ibid, subparagraphs (a) and (b).

6 Ibid, subparagraph (c).

- (e) Technology transfer and transfer of know-how;
- (f) Preparation of national positions for meetings of the Conferences of the Parties and other bodies of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions;
- (g) Development cooperation.”

10. The Ad Hoc Joint Working Group invited Parties and other stakeholders to promote the full and coordinated use of regional centres, to promote coherent chemicals and waste management and to promote the sound management of chemicals throughout their lifecycles and of hazardous wastes for sustainable development as well as for the protection of human health and the environment. It also requested the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and the Basel and Stockholm Convention regional centres to exchange information about their capacities and work programmes and invited the Global Environment Facility, other relevant international financial institutions and instruments, the regional centre host countries and others from the donor community to provide financial support necessary for the regional centres to carry out projects aimed at cooperation and coordination in support of implementation of the three conventions.⁷

III. Relevant issues and concepts from the strategic plan⁸ for establishing procedures for the operation of the clearing-house mechanism

11. As part of the development of the strategic plan for establishing procedures for the operation of the clearing-house mechanism countries submitted comments and suggestions. They suggested, among other things, that the clearing-house mechanism should:

- (a) Be cost-effective, have a reasonable budget and be implemented in a phased manner, with the Conference of the Parties guiding the process and approving each phase and budget;
- (b) Provide the means to identify and address the lack of specific information in several areas and address the need for mechanisms to identify further information needs;
- (c) Take into account the need to focus on issues related to the provision of technical and financial assistance and provide information aimed at the provision of technical and financial assistance;
- (d) Take into account and integrate information acquired through feasibility and case studies on regional and subregional centres;
- (e) Address the need to ensure the availability of information in the six official languages of the United Nations;
- (f) Provide methods for selecting countries for case studies related to the clearing-house mechanism, including through the elaboration of selection criteria for such case studies;
- (g) Take into account the importance of searching for synergies and efficiencies by coordinating with and linking to related initiatives.

12. Paragraph 63 of the strategic plan states that the persistent organic pollutants clearing-house mechanism is a multi-stakeholder global mechanism set up and operated by the Stockholm Convention Secretariat under the guidance and oversight of the Parties to facilitate the exchange of information on persistent organic pollutants. Its three major components are:

- (a) Information capital, or the content of information exchanged by the clearing-house mechanism network members. Information capital consists primarily of information on persistent organic pollutants but may include additional information as decided by the Parties;
- (b) Human capital, or the global network of information providers, users and institutions working to implement the Stockholm Convention and formally contributing to and using the clearing-house mechanism;
- (c) Operational capital, or a set of information tools, products and services and the necessary processes and resources to design, implement, operate and further enhance them.

⁷ Ibid, subparagraphs (o), (r) and (s).

⁸ UNEP/POPS/COP.3/INF/9.

13. The Secretariat's activities to develop the clearing-house mechanism have been divided among the three components of the strategic plan and have followed a phased approach as recommended by the Parties. The Conference of the Parties, in its decision SC-3/10, invited Parties and other stakeholders to use the same approach.

14. Accordingly the strategic plan establishes two goals, to be implemented in a phased approach as follows:

(a) Establishment of infrastructure and procedures to facilitate the identification, integration and exchange of information and the creation of a global knowledge base on persistent organic pollutants;

(b) Establishment of the clearing-house mechanism global network of information providers, users and institutions having the common needs of sharing information and expertise on persistent organic pollutants.

15. The Secretariat is developing a clearing-house mechanism node based on a website and other tools and procedures to facilitate the sharing of information on persistent organic pollutants. The node will make available meeting and workshop information, official documents, guidance and public awareness material, information on contact points and country information on implementation progress, among other things.

IV. Possible role of the clearing-house mechanism at the national and regional levels

16. Taking into account the mandates from the Conference of the Parties, the terms of reference of regional and subregional centres, relevant recommendations of the Ad Hoc Joint Working Group on Enhancing Cooperation and Coordination among the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the approaches and goals established in the strategic plan for establishing procedures for the operation of the clearing-house mechanism, it is proposed that the role of the clearing-house mechanism be extended to the national and regional levels as described in the following paragraphs.

A. Architecture, tools and infrastructure

17. Regional centres, national Governments and any other interested stakeholders are encouraged to develop their own clearing-house mechanism nodes, based on internet technologies and other traditional means of information exchange, compatible with the node being developed by the Secretariat. Regional centres are encouraged to undertake the above in consultation with the Secretariat. The aim is progressively to build a global network of clearing-house mechanism nodes that will facilitate the sharing of information within and across regions, Governments and other stakeholders, while maintaining local nodes focused on local priorities, sized according to their resources and expertise and operating in local languages.

18. To this aim the Secretariat will develop, in cooperation with Rotterdam and Basel convention secretariats, a guidance document for consideration by the Conference of the Parties of the Stockholm Convention at its fifth meeting.

19. In developing national and regional clearing-house mechanism nodes, Parties, regional centres and any other interested stakeholders may wish to consider building upon existing initiatives such as the Chemical Information Exchange Network (CIEN) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

20. The guidance document referred to in paragraph 18 above will enable the integration of existing initiatives into the global clearing-house mechanism. It will include, among other things, clear guidelines on information-sharing protocols, standards and possible classification systems, following a chemical and information life-cycle approach that will permit modern automated information flow between the various clearing-house mechanism nodes.

21. This approach will enable interested parties to build their clearing-house mechanism nodes based on technologies and expertise that are readily available to them, minimizing the need for training and capacity-building in this area. It will also enable the integration of information from other chemicals-related environmental conventions, which will facilitate greater cooperation and coordination at the regional and national levels.

22. The Secretariat may also consider developing a clearing-house mechanism development toolkit at a later stage to help Parties, regional centres and other stakeholders to build websites and information systems based on the experiences gained with the application of the guidance document referred to in paragraph 18 above.

B. Information scope

23. It is proposed that the national and regional nodes of the clearing-house mechanism extend the scope of their information content (as indicated in paragraphs 1 and 4 of the Stockholm Convention and clarified in paragraph 2 of decision SC-2/17) to cover other aspects of the management of chemicals and wastes throughout their life cycles, and the implementation of the Rotterdam and Basel Conventions, with the aim of eliminating duplication of effort and fostering synergies among the three chemicals conventions at the regional and national levels.

24. In this regard regional centers, national Governments and other interested stakeholders may wish to set up specialized clearing-house mechanism nodes to cover specific aspects of the life cycle of chemicals or specific aspects of the implementation of the conventions. Specialized centres, such as laboratories, could set up clearing-house mechanism nodes specialized in information generation, for example, while others might set up information dissemination nodes or specialize in public awareness and education.

25. The Secretariat will keep an up-to-date inventory of national and regional clearing-house mechanism nodes, along with information on their expertise and specialties. This inventory will facilitate the finding of specific information in various languages but also could be used to identify information gaps and to promote the opening of new clearing-house mechanism nodes to address such gaps.

C. Networking

26. Parties, regional centres and other interested stakeholders are encouraged:

(a) To increase collaboration among national and regional partners through, for example, the integration of their clearing-house mechanism nodes into existing networks and initiatives or those under development. To this end UNEP experiences in establishing CIEN in Africa and Latin America and other similar initiatives should be considered and built upon;

(b) To identify the roles, responsibilities and available expertise of each national partner in regard to the collection, dissemination and use of information in order to raise awareness and to assist the Secretariat in building a coherent inventory of related information-exchange initiatives, available information and expertise at the national and regional levels;

(c) To reinforce the clearing-house mechanism concept by encouraging official contact points, national focal points pursuant to Article 9 of the Stockholm Convention, in cooperation with focal points of the Rotterdam and Basel conventions, and other relevant national partners to build national and regional clearing-house mechanisms nodes to facilitate information exchange on local issues and priorities in local languages.

27. The Secretariat will develop, as part of its central clearing-house mechanism node, a platform to facilitate building an online community. The platform will be flexible enough to enable its use by groups and subgroups of experts, national authorities and any other members as proposed in the strategic plan for the clearing-house mechanism.

28. This online community will be developed using modern social networking web technologies, similar to those used on well known and highly popular commercial social networking websites, tailored to provide for adequate privacy. It will also enable the integration of focal points from interested related conventions and initiatives, including from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, other civil society groups and the general public.

D. Training and capacity-building

29. The Secretariat will develop a training and capacity-building programme⁹ in cooperation with the Rotterdam and Basel conventions to help countries and other interested stakeholders increase their capacity to build, contribute to and participate in the clearing-house mechanism.

E. Funding

30. The financial mechanism of the Stockholm Convention, including its principal entity the Global Environment Facility, other relevant international financial institutions and instruments, and others from the donor community are invited to provide, within their mandates, financial support necessary for parties, regional centres and other interested stakeholders to carry out projects aimed at improving information exchange at the regional and national levels and to set up clearing-house mechanism nodes as described in the present proposal, with the aim of supporting the implementation of the Stockholm Convention and enhancing coordination and cooperation with the Rotterdam and Basel conventions and other chemicals-related initiatives.

F. Time frame

31. The Secretariat will finalize the guidance document referred to in paragraph 18 by the end of 2010, in time to conduct pilot test projects with selected regional centres or national Governments, subject to the availability of funds. The Secretariat will report to the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting on the experience thus gained.

V. Possible action by the Conference of the Parties

32. The Conference of the Parties may wish:

(a) To consider endorsing the proposal described in the present document on the possible role of the clearing-house mechanism at the national and regional levels;

(b) To request the Secretariat to prepare a guidance document to facilitate implementation of the proposal by Parties and other stakeholders, including the Stockholm Convention regional centres;

(c) To request the financial mechanism of the Stockholm Convention, including its principal entity the Global Environment Facility, and to invite other relevant international financial institutions and others from the donor community to provide the financial resources necessary for Parties that are developing countries or countries with economies in transition, Stockholm Convention regional centres and other interested stakeholders to carry out projects aimed at improving information exchange at the regional and national levels and to set up clearing-house mechanism nodes as described in the present proposal.

9 UNEP/POPS/COP.4/37/Add.1, activities 13 and 18.