



Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants

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**Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm
Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
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Item 4 (f) of the provisional agenda*

**Matters related to the implementation
of the Convention: information exchange**

Outcomes of the initial phase of a pilot project to gather information on products free of persistent organic pollutants and to promote the use of available substitutes and alternatives

Note by the Secretariat

1. Paragraph 1 (b) of Article 9 of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants requests parties to facilitate or undertake the exchange of information relevant to alternatives to persistent organic pollutants, including information relating to their risks and their economic and social costs. Paragraph 4 of Article 10 encourages parties, in providing information on persistent organic pollutants and their alternatives, to use a broad range of means of communication.
2. By its decision SC-4/3, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention encouraged those parties that might seek specific exemptions for future persistent organic pollutant chemicals to make efforts to introduce alternative measures as soon as possible.
3. In response to that decision and with a view to assisting parties to implement their obligations under Articles 9 and 10 of the Convention, the Secretariat has considered opportunities for the development of a process for identifying consumer products free of persistent organic pollutants,¹ including the consideration of information on the availability of alternatives to and substitutes for persistent organic pollutants.
4. The Secretariat has launched a pilot project to gather information on products that are free of persistent organic pollutants and on the availability of related alternatives to and substitutes for persistent organic pollutants. These activities are a first step towards further consultations with parties and other key stakeholders and will explore the development of a programme to support parties in their efforts to eliminate the use of persistent organic pollutants and thereby to reduce the likelihood that parties will register specific exemptions for chemicals listed in Annexes A and B to the Convention. The present note contains information on the outcomes of the initial phase of the pilot project and the planned next steps.

* UNEP/POPS/COP.5/1.

¹ See paragraph 10 for the definition, in the context of this pilot project, of products free of persistent organic pollutants.

I. Description of the pilot project

5. Consultations with parties and stakeholders were organized by the Secretariat to identify possible means to facilitate the provision of information regarding products free of persistent organic pollutants and on the availability of related substitutes for and alternatives to such pollutants. Initial activities were also undertaken. A related draft concept note was presented to the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee at its sixth meeting.²

6. Subsequently, a pilot project was launched with the aim of gaining first-hand information on the availability of products and processes free of persistent organic pollutants in sectors of direct relevance to the Convention.³

A. Objective

7. The aim of the pilot project was to engage with parties and stakeholders to discuss opportunities to identify products free of persistent organic pollutants, as defined specifically for the project, and to share information on the process of identifying and introducing alternatives to and substitutes for persistent organic pollutants.

8. The project has been coordinated with the chemicals in products initiative facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the context of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management.⁴

9. The pilot project sought to encourage manufacturers and retailers of consumer products who had phased out products and processes using persistent organic pollutants to provide information on products free of persistent organic pollutants and on the alternatives and substitutes that they had employed.

10. The key criterion to be met if a product were to be classified as free of persistent organic pollutants was that it should not contain or consist of chemicals listed in Annex A, B or C to the Convention. A special definition was devised solely for the pilot project and was not to be used outside the project.⁵

11. All products for consideration in the pilot project were to be tested to ensure the absence of persistent organic pollutants to a defined limit of detection as outlined above. Information on products that passed the test was released to the public.

12. In addition, manufacturers and retailers participating in the pilot project were invited to provide any information that might be useful for case studies on the phase-out of persistent organic pollutants in products. That information consisted of an identification of the alternative used, a description of how it performed a function equivalent to that of the persistent organic pollutant previously used, and an assurance that persistent organic pollutants were not involved in its manufacture.

B. Partners

13. The project was coordinated by the Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention and implemented in cooperation with several stakeholders.

14. The International Chemical Secretariat,⁶ Beratungsgesellschaft für integrierte

2 UNEP/POPRC.6/INF/28.

3 Sectors seen as possible targets of the project were potential intentional and unintentional users and producers of persistent organic pollutants in consumer end products. These included, but were not limited to, textiles and carpets, pulp and paper, electrical and electronic equipment, and plastic and furniture production companies.

4 In May 2009, the International Conference of Chemicals Management recognized chemicals in products as a priority emerging chemicals policy issue and adopted resolution II/4 C, by which it agreed to implement a project on chemicals in products to be coordinated by UNEP. Further information can be found at www.chem.unep.ch/unep/chemsaicm/cip/default.htm.

5 The negative detection limit in products to be tested was 0.5 mg/kg for all persistent organic pollutants except polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans, whose detection limit was 0.10 µg/kg. For some particular matrices, for which specific adaptation would be necessary, testing at a level of 2 mg/kg for all persistent organic pollutants except polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans (detection limit of 0.10 µg/kg) was guaranteed.

6 The International Chemical Secretariat is a non-profit organization founded in 2002 that aims to contribute to a toxic free environment by 2020. Further information can be found at www.chemsec.org.

Problemlösungen (BiPRO)⁷ and Environment Agency Austria served as project consultants, identifying, contacting and liaising with manufacturers and retailers with the objective of ensuring their participation in the pilot project. Environment Agency Austria also developed a conceptual framework and requirements for the analytical testing of selected products,⁸ and served as an information-exchange mechanism for manufacturers and retailers.

15. All institutions involved were members of a project steering committee that also included a representative of the chemicals in products project and a representative of the International POPs Elimination Network. The latter also contributed to the identification of specific manufacturers focusing on non-chemical alternatives.

C. Methodology

16. At the beginning of the project, the steering committee established a list of sectors and criteria from which the consultants selected companies. The scope of the pilot project remained limited and focused on some sectors and companies.

17. Sectors were selected for their relevance to the production and use of persistent organic pollutants, and included firms from the textile, sport, computer, electronics, automotive and automotive supplies, upholstery, mineral oil, semiconductor, furniture, construction, cleaning agent and toy industries. Among the criteria used to select companies was the likelihood that they had previously used persistent organic pollutants.

18. Companies were contacted individually by the consultants and other members of the steering committee to ascertain their interest in testing products for persistent organic pollutants and to gather information on their use of alternatives and substitutes. The focus was on the identification of what were termed “lighthouse” companies, i.e., those that had demonstrated innovation in phasing out persistent organic pollutants. The testing of such companies’ products would determine whether the level of persistent organic pollutants was consistent with the limits defined in paragraph 10 above.

19. Companies were invited to confirm that, when phasing out or eliminating the use of persistent organic pollutants in their products or processes, there had been no substitution with compounds that exhibit the characteristics outlined in Annex D to the Stockholm Convention: persistence, bioaccumulation, potential for long-range environmental transport and adverse effects.

20. Companies were also invited to confirm that they had substituted the persistent organic pollutant formerly in their products with chemicals that did not have hazardous properties that raised serious concern, such as mutagenicity, carcinogenicity or adverse effects on the reproductive, developmental, endocrine, immune or nervous systems. Furthermore, companies were required to confirm that their products contained no other persistent-organic-pollutant-like halogenated substances, taking into account the previously indicated detection limit.

21. Another aspect taken into consideration when identifying possible lighthouse companies was that such companies needed publicly to identify the chemical or non-chemical alternatives to and substitutes for persistent organic pollutants that they had used for the persistent organic pollutants in question. It was anticipated that transparency would help to provide clear information to consumers and to facilitate the identification of available and effective alternatives.

22. Any products submitted as part of the pilot project were to be tested in an accredited laboratory and any found to be free of persistent organic pollutants identified on a publicly available website.

23. The costs of participating in the pilot project, including those for analytical testing, were to be borne by the individual companies.

II. Preliminary observations and conclusions

24. One of the pilot project’s objectives was to support awareness-raising and outreach activities by providing well-targeted information on products, while seeking to reach new stakeholder groups such as end consumers and individual companies. Activities also sought to support the phasing out of the intentional production and use of chemicals listed in Annexes A and B and specific exemptions.

⁷ BiPRO is a consulting firm providing support and solutions to technical, economical, environmental and health-related questions for public authorities, industrial associations and individual companies. Further information can be found at www.bipro.de/index-en.html.

⁸ www.umweltbundesamt.at/en/services/services_pollutants/en_leistungen_analytik/.

25. Of the 50 companies contacted, 15 manufacturers and retailers responded positively to the project, with a number expressing support for the idea of developing the project's marketing, customer relations and visibility aspects.

26. One of the challenges and barriers faced, particularly by larger multinational companies, in engaging fully with the project was the relatively short time frame of the initial pilot phase. This was seen as a disincentive, with some companies saying that visibility could be maximized if more time were available, for example, in a full programme. Some companies indicated that they would require more time to undertake internal consultations before they could fully engage in the pilot project.

27. Moreover, some companies responded that the project was not sufficiently relevant for them. In some cases, for example, companies had either never used persistent organic pollutants, had stopped using them a long time previously, or had undertaken strict tests to ensure the quality of their products. The costs related to the analytical testing of products posed problems for some smaller companies.

28. Following up on the initial positive responses and contacts established, the Secretariat will look to continue the activities and explore other means of further collaboration and partnerships with companies that have shown interest in participating in a related programme.

29. Based on consultations with parties, industry bodies and other stakeholders, the Secretariat wishes to develop a basis for a broader programme of information exchange with regard to alternatives and substitutes and on products free of persistent organic pollutants for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its sixth meeting.

A. Awareness-raising

30. Through the pilot project, it was possible to target specific stakeholders, such as individual companies, to increase their awareness of the objectives of the Convention and to seek opportunities for their further engagement. The development of a full awareness-raising and outreach campaign on products free of persistent organic pollutants was, however, beyond the scope of the pilot project.

31. The proposal to identify products free of persistent organic pollutants was perceived in a positive light by some small producers and retailers, who saw it as a relevant way for them to increase the visibility and profile of their companies and products. Some larger companies were less interested in testing their products and in improving the visibility of those products and of the company itself. Nevertheless, as such companies remained interested in the project, their engagement will be sought further.

32. The links between awareness-raising aspects and companies' marketing strategies were of particular interest. Some companies indicated that linking their own products and brand marketing to toxic chemicals might not always be appropriate, while others were very interested in making that link.

33. Marketing considerations were seen as important and further consultations will assist in developing the visibility and marketing of a possible programme on products and processes free of persistent organic pollutants and on information exchange on alternatives and substitutes.

34. Based on the continued interest of companies and the willingness of parties and other stakeholders to embark fully on a partnership, it may be possible to increase the visibility of products free of persistent organic pollutants and processes by linking specific initiatives, as appropriate, to the Safe Planet campaign.⁹

35. The development of activities to raise awareness of the use and production of persistent organic pollutants and of the Stockholm Convention will assist parties in meeting their obligations under Articles 9 and 10 of the Convention.

36. It can be expected that a dialogue with industry bodies and other relevant stakeholders will facilitate specific actions to raise the awareness of key groups, including potential users and producers of persistent organic pollutants, end consumers and policymakers.

B. Information on substitutes and alternatives

37. Although the pilot project's focus was on the identification of products free of persistent organic pollutants, it offered the opportunity for the Secretariat to discuss directly with companies

⁹ The Safe Planet campaign, also known as the United Nations Campaign for Responsibility on Hazardous Chemicals and Wastes, was launched on 24 February 2010 in Bali, Indonesia, during the simultaneous extraordinary meetings of the conferences of the parties to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention.

opportunities for exchanging information on alternatives and substitutes used in products and processes.

38. Time constraints prevented some companies from testing products during the pilot project. Others indicated that, although they had already tested their products for quality control internally, they would remain interested in the project and open to discussing production processes and techniques that did not involve persistent organic pollutants. A limited number were reluctant to discuss the use of alternatives and substitutes as the processes in which those were used had been patented.

39. Given the pilot project's appeal to a significant number of companies, the Secretariat will seek to consult parties, interested companies and other stakeholders further to identify possible areas of collaboration and means of exchanging information on alternatives and substitutes.

40. Work in this regard could focus on specific cases and sectors that are of relevance to Article 3 of the Convention. It could aim to tie in with parties' efforts to meet their obligations under paragraphs 1 and 3 of Article 3 on the elimination of production and use of chemicals listed in Annexes A and B and of new pesticides and industrial chemicals. Focus could also include chemicals for which parties have registered exemptions under Article 4.

III. Next steps

41. Given the pilot project's positive preliminary results, it can be concluded that the continuation of the project through broader consultations with parties and stakeholders could lead to significant progress in the areas of awareness-raising and information dissemination with regard to persistent organic pollutants and their alternatives and substitutes.

42. The Secretariat will seek to involve further parties, industry bodies, individual companies, civil society organizations and relevant stakeholders in discussions. Subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources, the Secretariat is suggesting the organization of additional consultations on more specific aspects of this proposed programme to be undertaken during the period between the sixth and seventh meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

43. Such a process would aim to engage stakeholders in efforts to demonstrate innovation in the identification, introduction and use of alternatives and substitutes to raise awareness of their existence. Preliminary consultations would in particular aim to involve companies that have identified substitutes for persistent organic pollutants and are showing technical and ecological innovation, for example in the field of green chemistry. Awareness-raising efforts would focus on motivating manufacturers to continue to find alternatives to persistent organic pollutants.

44. Among the issues for consideration in the process could be the development of marketing and information tools to promote products and processes free of persistent organic pollutants, defining information-exchange platforms on substitutes and alternatives in defined sectors, opportunities for the development of a labelling scheme, and links with existing industry and other relevant initiatives.

45. The Secretariat will also consider the development of a broader programme that would support parties, particularly developing-country parties and parties with economies in transition, in their efforts to raise the awareness of the broader public and of industry on persistent organic pollutants in products. Such a programme would also support all parties in gathering and exchanging information on the efficiency of control measures supporting the phase-out of persistent organic pollutants in products. It would actively engage industry bodies.

46. A programme may also be based on the exchange of experiences of and lesson learned by parties, companies and other relevant stakeholders relating to the identification and introduction of alternatives to and substitutes for persistent organic pollutants in products and processes. It may cover areas such as the establishment and implementation of legal and administrative measures necessary to eliminate the production and use of the chemicals listed in Annex A and to restrict the production and use of the chemicals listed in Annex B, in compliance with paragraph 1 of Article 3 of the Convention. Measures may include incentives for specific sectors to use substitutes and alternatives, the highlighting of best practices and awareness-raising schemes.

47. Sectoral consultations may help parties to identify specific measures, linked to paragraph 3 of Article 3, to prevent the production and use of new pesticides and new industrial chemicals and problems linked to substances that exhibit the characteristics of persistent organic pollutants. It would also be envisaged that further progress in reducing the use of persistent organic pollutants and encouraging the use of alternatives would assist parties in reducing specific exemptions allowed under Article 4.

48. The development of targeted awareness-raising and information-exchange programmes are critical for the implementation of Articles 9 and 10 of the Convention. These may include industry schemes for sharing information on the presence and use of persistent organic pollutants in specific products and finding appropriate platforms for sharing information on alternatives and substitutes in products and processes.

49. Activities under any programme established will be coordinated with the chemicals in products initiative, the implementation and outcomes of which will be reported on by UNEP to the Open-ended Working Group of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management at its meeting in Belgrade in August 2011 and to the International Conference on Chemicals Management at its third session, in 2012.

50. The Secretariat will further consult parties and other stakeholders with a view to developing a programme and will report on progress to the Conference of the Parties at its sixth meeting, in 2013.
