



Training and Capacity Building Programmes in Chemicals and Waste Management

United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

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Welcome to the first issue of the UNITAR Chemicals and Waste Management Newsletter. Inside, you will find out about recent events and achievements of countries that contribute to the sound management of chemicals. For further details on UNITAR CWM programmes and services, please refer to our Internet site at www.unitar.org/cwm. We welcome any comments or questions: they can be sent to the address below, or by email to cwm@unitar.org.

UNITAR/ILO/OECD launch a “Global Partnership for Capacity Building for Chemical Classification and Labelling” at WSSD

Johannesburg, August 2002. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002. The Summit has generated a number of Partnerships which are not negotiated by all present, but rather agreed by those directly interested and involved in a particular topic. Partnerships would go beyond purely inter-governmental activities, and may include a wide range of stakeholders and their activities. With the upcoming adoption by the UN of the Globally Harmonized System for Chemical Classification and Labelling (GHS) and in light of documented needs for related training and capacity building, UNITAR, ILO and OECD have developed a proposal for a “Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the GHS” which was presented at the Summit as part of the official WSSD programme.

The main goal of the Partnership is to strengthen capacities at all levels and sectors – in particular in developing countries – to ensure a higher degree of chemical labelling and related precautionary measures for industrial chemicals, agricultural chemicals, chemicals in transport and consumer chemicals. In the medium and long term, the Partnership is expected to lead to a decrease in environmental and human health related effects attributable to the use of hazardous

chemicals. UNITAR, ILO and OECD invite and encourage other governments and major groups, in particular industry, to join the Partnership as core partners in order to initiative expeditious action towards reaching the WSSD target of widespread international GHS implementation by 2008.

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South Africa signs agreement with UNITAR on GHS implementation

Pretoria, August 2002. South Africa, represented by the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), has signed an agreement with UNITAR for a training and capacity building project which reviews the implications of implementing the GHS and will develop an implementation strategy for South Africa. The project recognises the importance of chemical hazard communication as a key tool for protecting the health of people and the environment in South Africa, as well as the need to address human resource development regarding chemical hazard communication. The project is jointly funded by the South African Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and UNITAR as part of a larger project supported by the Government of the Netherlands.

The project will take place in three phases: (i) situational analysis; (ii) gap analysis; and (iii) development of an implementation strategy. An important and innovative component of the project will be the national testing of the comprehensibility of written and graphic hazard warnings, based on a testing methodology developed by the University of Cape Town and pilot-tested in Zambia. See related stories on comprehensibility testing and the GHS Partnership below.

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Ecuador releases nation-wide chemicals emergency response guide

Quito, March 2002. The Ecuadorian Ministry of the Environment released a practical guide that provides a listing of key institutions and contacts, and important chemical-specific information for first responders that can assist in responding to a chemicals-related emergency. This guide, which was published as part of a three-country Swiss-supported project executed through UNITAR will be used on a national basis.

As part of the project, Ecuador is developing a detailed Action Plan for a nation-wide system for chemicals emergency response, involving all interested parties including fire-fighters, the national police, local officials, civil defence, health care specialists, government ministries and non-governmental organisations. The guide has been widely distributed and is in the hands of the front-line emergency responders in the country.

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University of Zambia undertakes field testing of chemical hazard communication symbols

Lusaka, July 2002. As part of the larger, two-year Netherlands-funded project on “Developing and Implementing a Chemical Hazard Communication and GHS Action Plan”, Zambia undertook testing of a variety of chemical symbols and hazard statements in order to ensure that chemical hazards are communicated to workers and the public in a comprehensible way. It is of crucial importance that chemical hazard communication tools like labels and safety data sheets are understood by their target audiences in order to catalyse protective measures and behavioural change.

The project was conducted by the University of Zambia in close cooperation with the University of Cape Town and the Environmental Council of

Zambia. It tested the existing levels of comprehension of labels and safety data sheets among chemical users in the agricultural, consumer, industry and transport and sectors throughout the country. According to the chemical industry, participation in the project has already had a significant positive impact on participating workers. Preliminary analysis has revealed low levels of comprehension of most label elements and a poor understanding of SDS words and phrases. Consideration will therefore be given in the context of the larger project to the commencement of a comprehensive training programme regarding improving understanding of chemical labels and safety data sheets.

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Senegal injects sound management of chemicals into government-wide internal budget planning

Dakar, May 2002. Chemicals management issues, long recognised as an important area related to the protection of the environment and human health, are now being formally recognised within the Government of Senegal as part of its regular budget-making process, for the 2003 fiscal year. This is the result of a UNITAR/IOMC Swiss-supported project in Senegal addressing issues of Integrated Chemicals Management. The project assists all those involved in chemicals-related issues to strengthen their working relationships and planning skills to ensure concrete outcomes from joint activities.

Chemicals-related activities are to be injected into the domestic budgeting process on the following topics: chemical hazard communication and poison control centre development. The development of draft Action Plans on both topics following a systematic framework adapted by Senegal as part of the Project was a key reason for the increased attention now being paid to these topics on a government-wide basis. This action sets a precedent for Senegal, which receives significant resources for

chemicals management from bilateral and multi-lateral sources external to the country.

The Senegalese Ministry of Youth and the Environment, the Lead Agency for the Project, feels that the integration of these issues into the internal budgeting process will demonstrate to outside donors that they are of high priority within the country. The country-driven nature of chemicals management issues is a key requirement for the long-term sustainability of work on integrated chemicals management.

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Training on registering less harmful pesticides commences in Ghana

Accra, July 2002. Ghana reached an important milestone towards establishing a pesticides registration scheme by commencing training on registering less harmful pesticides for use in the country. The training, which was provided by FAO in close cooperation with UNITAR, is part of a Netherlands-supported project to strengthen decision-making on chemicals.

UNITAR and FAO will follow-up the initial training with expert assistance on evaluating environmental and health-related information that has been submitted by pesticides companies to Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency. The aim of this work is to ensure that less harmful pesticides than those currently used in Ghana will be introduced as replacements, should the evaluations determine that they are safer alternatives.

As an integral part of the project, FAO will test a draft guidance document on this subject in Ghana as part of the development of a general guidance document for developing countries on developing pesticides registration systems. It is anticipated that the lessons learned in Ghana will help to ensure that the guidance document will be practical and address the needs of developing countries.

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New attention paid to creative public service video in Sri Lanka aimed at preventing pesticide poisonings resulting from misuse

Colombo, May 2002. As a result of a systematic stock-taking exercises as part of a Netherlands-supported project on chemical hazard communication in Sri Lanka, a "hands on" and revealing public service video has been uncovered that brings attention to the negative health effects of misusing pesticides. The video depicts "before and after" scenes showing a field worker applying pesticides in agricultural fields inappropriately (e.g. without protective clothing) and, after training, with proper clothing and other precautionary measures.

The worker in the former (untrained and unprotected) setting shows symptoms of serious, acute pesticides poisoning after spraying in the field, including nausea, disorientation, and fatigue. The "after" depiction shows a healthy worker, unaffected by the pesticides he is using.

The video, due to budgetary constraints was only shown on Sri Lankan television a few times. As part of the UNITAR Netherlands-supported project, action is being taken to ensure that this important health protection tool will be more widely distributed by those that use pesticides in the field.

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Four new National Profiles completed: Bahrain, Chad, Lesotho and Uganda

The Middle East and Africa, early 2002. In recent months, four new National Profiles to assess the national infrastructure for the Management of Chemicals have been completed or are near

completion in Bahrain, Chad, Lesotho and Uganda. A National Chemical Management Profile, which is an internationally-recognised tool to determine the baseline of chemicals-related activities and gaps in a country, has been endorsed by the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Financing for the preparation of the National Profiles has been provided by the European Commission through projects executed through UNITAR. The four Profiles will be added to the 63 Profiles already completed world-wide, and will be a major contribution to the IFCS goal that half the countries participating in the IFCS complete their Profile by the end of 2002. Some twenty-four countries have reported that they have a Profile under development at present. South Africa and Syria are expected to complete their Profiles in the near future.

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UNITAR signs cooperation agreement on POPs with UNEP

Geneva, July 2002. UNITAR has signed an important agreement with the Chemicals Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide training and capacity building assistance to a twelve-country Global Environment Facility (GEF) project on National Implementation Plan development for the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

The first stage of the project, which will take place over the remainder of 2002, involves the development or updating of National Profiles as an early step in National Implementation Plan development. This follows GEF guidelines for enabling activities on POPs, which were endorsed by countries through the GEF Council in May 2001. The twelve countries involved in the project are: Barbados, Bulgaria, Chile, Ecuador, Guinea

(Conakry), Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Slovenia and Zambia.

Project activities commenced in August 2002 with a joint UNEP-UNITAR mission to initiate the project in Zambia. UNITAR will assist UNEP's efforts in at least nine of the twelve countries.

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