

Working Group 7: Communication and information exchange among Convention focal points

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Need for regular communication and co-ordination. Standing Committee.

The working group started with a short discussion on the importance of regular communication and co-ordination between national focal points for various chemicals and waste conventions. It was agreed that such communication and co-ordination was very important. However, it was also agreed that it was equally important that the work with international conventions is based on a more general approach on chemicals risk management and that it is ensured that all aspects in the framework of sustainable development are paid appropriate attention to (environmental, health, social, economic).

Many DC's and CET's have established Standing Committees for chemicals risk management in general, often based on the structure of the committee for stakeholder participation established for the work with National Profiles. Those countries successfully make use of these committees for co-ordination of the work with international conventions. Normally, not only environmental, health and labor ministries are represented but also other ministries with stakes in chemicals risk management aiming at sustainable development as ministries of economy, industry, foreign affairs etc. The lead ministry should be the ministry allocated the main responsibility for chemicals control including for international conventions. The choice of lead ministry may differ depending on national conditions.

The group agreed that there was a need to establish an overarching Standing Committee for chemicals management including issues concerning international conventions. The Committee should have regular meetings and when found appropriate. It should have representatives from ministries/governmental institutions in charge with chemicals and waste management in general including focal points for conventions as well as from other ministries of importance (see above). Other stakeholders should be consulted as found appropriate.

A Standing Committee might, depending on national conditions and if found appropriate, have substructures as committees/steering groups for individual conventions or groups of conventions. Such committees might also be established directly by institutions appointed as focal points. In that case it is important to make sure that the overarching Standing Committee for chemicals management is consulted and given proper information on issues concerning international conventions.

The group recognized difficulties in countries to immediately establish broad Standing Committees for chemicals risk management in general. The way towards such a Committee might be by first establishing a temporary committee for international conventions. In that case the number of conventions covered must be large enough to

give the committee a broad perspective. By including the coming work with SAICM the committee would get such a perspective.

Important topics for the Standing Committee as regards international chemicals and waste conventions

The Standing Committee should deal with overarching issues of interest for many governmental institutions and other stakeholders as:

- information sharing,
- treaty contents (e.g chemicals to be addressed) and language,
- national implementation of conventions (standards, legislation, regulations),
- national enforcement (compliance by enterprises),
- national implications/consequences as regards sustainability (on environment, health, social conditions, economy) direct and indirect, negative and positive,
- other national priorities.

It should be noted that the final decisions on national standpoints is up to the institution appointed as a focal point/the ministry in charge. In order to ensure continuity and an appropriate level of decision-making, focal points should be institutions, not persons. In addition to information exchange in the Standing Committee, the focal points need to develop an efficient system for information exchange.

Main role for the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee should have an important role during the preparation of international meetings and for discussion and evaluation after such meetings.

Before international meetings on conventions the Standing Committee might by focal points/ministries be used:

- for consultation on possible national viewpoints at start of work with new issues,
- for consultation on possible national standpoints to proposals and other agenda items to be discussed at meetings.

All national stakeholders should be consulted.

After international meetings it would be appropriate with:

- reports to the Standing Committee meetings for discussion and evaluation.

After international meetings reports should be prepared by institutions in charge and distributed (mail, e.mail, websites, meetings, workshops etc.) to stakeholders. The general public should be informed via media and by other appropriate means.