



Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD

Comité Consultatif Economique et Industriel Auprès de l' OCDE

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BIAC Commentary on the Need for International Chemicals Management

Agenda 21, Chapter 19, established and agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio in 1992 is the basis of contemporary ideals on chemicals management (1). Whilst clearly much work was underway before Rio, it has set focus for governments and industry around the world. Agenda 21 is a blueprint for action, to be acted on globally and one which many organisations have been working hard to achieve over the last nine years. Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 sets out the key requirements for managing chemicals:

- Collaboration and accelerating internationally assessment of chemical risks
- Harmonisation of classification and labelling of chemicals
- Information exchange on toxic chemicals and chemical risks
- Establishment of risk reduction programmes
- Strengthening of national capabilities and capacities for management of chemicals
- Prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products
- Enhancement of international cooperation relating to several of the programme areas

As a follow up to UNCED, the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) was created to integrate and consolidate national and international efforts to manage chemicals and to act as a stakeholder forum. The IOMC was established to co-ordinate the work on chemicals of several intergovernmental organisations. We believe that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has a valuable role to play within IFCS and more generally in considering chemicals management in a global context (2).

Over the years both legislative and voluntary policies have been designed to protect man and the environment from the risks associated with emissions released as well as the risks posed by the use of both organic and inorganic substances which are contained in products. The industry is also subject to policies aimed at managing risks posed by the use of organic and inorganic substances themselves. Appropriate and widely available information is the critical foundation of any chemical management policy (3).

The OECD chemicals programme has made a meaningful contribution in setting a global framework for chemicals management including:

- Test guidelines
- Good Laboratory Practice
- Pesticides programme
- Classification and labelling of hazardous chemicals
- Safety data sheets
- Existing substances hazard assessments
- New substances
- Risk communication and management
- Socio-economic analysis

- Pollutant Release and Transfer Register
- Biocides
- Chemical accidents

Many of these areas are now established as global standards (eg test guidelines) and others are the subject of Council Decisions and Recommendations (eg new substances and existing substances), ultimately attracting a consistent harmonised approach to work.

In all of the areas listed above OECD has played an important role in building trust between Governments which has led to mutual acceptance; be this in the area of test guidelines or existing substance hazard assessment. It is essential that the Member Countries of OECD are intimately involved in developing these programmes, as in many cases they ultimately will put in place legislation. As the trend towards globalisation increases so will the importance and reliance on the assessments and work of other governments; we therefore see a unique and continuing role for OECD. The savings to Member Governments has been set out [2].

The BIAC Chemicals Committee is pleased to be involved with this important work and has and will continue to contribute expertise and financial assistance where possible. In the last 4 years, BIAC has contributed over \$100 000 to the process, in those areas of work which we have considered to be particularly important. This is the most visible form of recognition that we can attach to the OECD chemicals programme. We recognise that the less visible aspects are the many days of “sweat equity” contributed by industry experts.

It is not only the countries already in membership of OECD that gain from the chemicals programme; it is also those with developing industries. The OECD programme allows the governments of these countries to start to work on chemicals management and control at a level appropriate to them, whilst promoting global trade through a harmonised regulatory approach. For example some countries will be at the stage of gathering hazard information and passing on this information. In this case the test guidelines, GLP, SDS and classification work will be helpful. For those governments seeking to put in place a new substances programme, the OECD work has already proved to be useful. This work strengthens national capabilities and capacities for management of chemicals, thus directly adding to Agenda 21.

The OECD Council In May 2001 recognised that: “Our societies, as well as those of all other countries, face major transitions. We look to OECD to continue its pathfinder role of identifying and evaluating emerging policy issues and developing new policy concepts and approaches in areas where the Organisation has comparative advantage. OECD contributes to deeper international understanding, a more stable international economic system and enhanced prosperity worldwide, through its unique and indispensable intergovernmental process of analysis, dialogue and policy development”.

Ministers went on to say “We are committed to *shaping globalisation* to the benefit of all, and ensuring that the poorest are not left behind. We recognise the need, nationally and internationally, to bring greater coherence across the range of policies that impact on the achievement of this goal. Trade, investment and development policies, in particular, have a vital contribution to make to sustainable development and poverty reduction: strengthening the coherence among these policy areas deserves special attention. We look to OECD to assist us in this task”.

The BIAC Chemicals Committee supports these views, and would prefer to see more direct support and recognition of the OECDs chemical programme which is contributing so much to Agenda 21, Chapter 19. BIAC therefore requests that the Member Governments of OECD fully consider the role that the OECD chemicals programme has played and should continue to play as a key focus for international chemicals management.

In conclusion, BIAC would recommend that OECD plays a leading role in the ongoing discussions on global chemicals management. Additionally, there seems to be a real role in working with regional chemicals management programmes such as those in Canada, US, Japan and the European Union to bring balance, integration and co-ordination to activities recalling that sustainable development is comprised of three pillars one of which is economics.

BIAC stands ready to assist the OECD and its members in bringing forward these programmes.

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1. Agenda 21 The United Nations Programme of Action from Rio ISBN 92-1-100509-4
 2. OECD 'Savings to governments and industry resulting from the OECD environment health and safety programme' ENV/EPOC/ MIN (98)5
 3. OECD Environmental Outlook for the Chemicals Industry, 2001