

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) to enter into force on 17 May 2004

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) will become legally binding on 17 May 2004

At the Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, held 22 to 23 May 2001 in Stockholm, Sweden, the Convention was adopted and opened for Signature.

The initial target list has identified 12 POPs: aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, mirex, toxaphene, polychlorinated biphenols or PCBs, hexachlorobenzene, dioxins and furans.

The Convention seeks the elimination or restriction of production and use of all intentionally produced POPs (i.e. industrial chemicals and pesticides). It also seeks the continuing minimisation and, where feasible, ultimate elimination of releases of unintentionally produced POPs such as dioxins and furans. Stockpiles must be managed and disposed of in a safe, efficient and environmentally sound manner. The Convention imposes certain trade restrictions.

On 17 February 2004, the fiftieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession to become a Party to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants was submitted by France. Ninety days following this submission, 17 May 2004, the Convention will enter into force.

The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Stockholm Convention will take place in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in early 2005. One of this meeting's priorities will be to assist countries to combat malaria by replacing DDT with the increasingly safe and effective alternatives. The COP will also establish a Committee for evaluating other chemicals and pesticides that could be added to the initial target list of 12 POPs. Another key goal for the COP will be to finalise guidelines for promoting 'best environmental practices' and 'best available techniques' that can reduce or eliminate releases of dioxins and furans.

The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade

The Convention entered into force on 24 February 2004

The Rotterdam Convention, based on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure, prevents export of harmful pesticides and industrial chemicals, unless the importing country agrees to accept them. It was adopted on 10 September 1998 by a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Objectives of the Convention

- to promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm; and
- to contribute to the environmentally sound use of those hazardous chemicals, by facilitating information exchange about their characteristics, by providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export and by disseminating these decisions to Parties.

The Convention creates legally binding obligations for the implementation of the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure. It builds on the existing voluntary PIC procedure, operated by UNEP and FAO since 1989, and takes into account experience gained during the implementation of the voluntary procedure (as set out in the London Guidelines for the Exchange of Information on Chemicals in International Trade and the FAO International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides).

Major Provisions

- The Convention establishes the principle that export of a chemical covered by the Convention can only take place with the prior informed consent of the importing party. The Convention establishes a 'Prior Informed Consent procedure,' a means for formally obtaining and disseminating the deci-

sions of importing countries as to whether they wish to receive future shipments of specified chemicals and for ensuring compliance with these decisions by exporting countries.

- The Convention also contains provisions for the exchange of information among Parties about potentially hazardous chemicals that may be exported and imported.
- The Convention covers pesticides and industrial chemicals that have been banned or severely restricted for health or environmental reasons by Parties and which have been notified by Parties for inclusion in the PIC procedure. One notification from each of two specified regions triggers consideration of addition of a chemical to the PIC procedure, with the regions to be determined by the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Severely hazardous pesticide formulations that present a hazard under conditions of use in developing countries or countries with economies in transition may also be nominated for inclusion in the procedure.
- The Convention initially covers 22 pesticides (including five severely hazardous pesticide formulations) and 5 industrial chemicals, but many more are expected to be added in the future. The Conference of the Parties will decide on the inclusion of chemicals.

Decision-Making Bodies

- The Convention establishes a Conference of the Parties to oversee implementation and a Chemicals Review Committee to review notifications and nominations from Parties and make recommendations on which chemicals should be included in the PIC procedure.
- The Convention also establishes a Secretariat, whose functions are to be performed jointly by UNEP and FAO.

Germany is applying to host the secretariat of the Stockholm (POPs) and Rotterdam (PIC) Convention. Both the priorities and the organisation of the secretariats are closely interlinked. Accommodating them jointly in Bonn would tap the full potential of these close links. For further information, go to: <http://www.pic.bonn.de>.