Information Note

Informal Workshop on Stakeholders' Information Needs on Chemicals in Articles/Products

Background, Aim and Expectations

Background

The reduced use of hazardous chemicals is one of the key challenges in achieving sustainable consumption and production.   Recently, there has been a growing interest and understanding of the spread of and potential exposure to chemicals from articles[1], such as personal computers, textiles, and costume jewellery. Not the least has the recall of children toys due to possible content of lead attracted attention worldwide. Information exchange is one key factor to enabling actors to avoid and / or properly manage hazardous chemicals and reduce risks to users and the environment. The need for better communication throughout the product chain has been raised and the overall aim of the workshop is to contribute to improved conditions for informed decision making in this context.

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) was adopted in February 2006 in Dubai at the high-level International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM). The overall objective of the Strategic Approach is:
To achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life-cycle so that, by 2020, chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment
Detailed objectives that are set for five different areas in the Overarching Policy Strategy (OPS) will contribute to the overall objective. With regard to knowledge and information OPS 15 states:
(b)   To ensure, for all stakeholders:
(i)   That information on chemicals throughout their life cycle, including, where appropriate,
chemicals in products*, is available, accessible, user friendly, adequate and appropriate to the needs of all stakeholders. Appropriate types of information include their effects on human health and the environment, their intrinsic properties, their potential uses, their protective measures and regulation.*

The Global Plan of Action that accompanies the OPS, include three activities of particular relevance:
108. Articles and products containing hazardous substances should all be accompanied by relevant information for users, workplaces and at disposal sites.
111. For all chemicals in commerce, appropriate information detailing their inherent hazards should be made available to the public at no charge and generated where needed with essential health, safety and environmental information made available. Other information should be available according to a balance between the public's right to know and the need to protect valid confidential business information and legitimate proprietary interests.

---

[1] Article in this context means an object which during production is given a special shape, surface or design which determines its function to a greater degree than does its chemical composition. Examples of articles are, textile, clothing, electronics, toys and furniture.

.

112. Undertake awareness-raising for consumers, in particular by educating them on best practices for chemical use, about the risks that the chemicals they use pose to themselves and their environment and the pathways by which exposures occur.

Aim

The intention is now to take a first concrete step towards achieving this objective and preparing for possible discussions under the session on emerging issues at the Second International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM2) in May 2009.

The workshop will provide a forum for exchange of views and experiences of issues and potential models for how information on chemicals in articles can be provided and substances and product groups prioritized. Cases from both industry and government side will provide useful examples concerning potentially harmful releases and exposures of chemicals from articles at different stages of the products life cycle.

The three day workshop will gather expertise from developed and developing countries and all groups of stakeholders and give special focus on the needs and concerns of developing countries, e.g. facilitated access to foreign markets by meeting growing demands from purchasers and other customers for improved product information.

The problem of extensive spread of chemical substances through commodities has a global dimension and thus it needs global solutions. Communicating information on chemicals contained in articles would open more possibilities for risk reduction of chemicals at all stages in the product life-cycle: during production; distribution and use as well as in the disposal/recycling phase.

There are also linkages to the Marrakech process on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), which addresses inefficient use of natural resources. Obvious connections between sustainable use of chemicals and sustainable production of articles include the implications regarding recycling possibilities for articles that contain hazardous chemicals. Better information on chemicals contained in articles would increase the possibilities to reach the goals of both the SAICM process and the Marrakech process. An additional result of the workshop could hence be the creation of synergies between the two processes.

Expectations from the workshop

The workshop will serve as an important starter to gather experience and competence, and to initiate international discussions for addressing the issue by submitting to ICCM2 a report and possible recommendations for a more formal process to address the issue.

The workshop is expected to result in the following outcome:

1. Workshop proceedings

2. A final report and recommendation from the workshop for possible future work as a substantial contribution to the discussions under emerging policy issues at ICCM2.
3. An outline of possible next steps to consider in stakeholder implementation of SAICM including; a contribution to the SAICM clearing house mechanism with relevant information sources, tools and case examples and potential cooperative projects.
4. Possibly suggestion for a draft resolution from ICCM2 on how to proceed.