

UNWANTED STOCKS OF HAZARDOUS WASTES BREAKING THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Several factors will determine whether or not pesticides products constitute obsolete stocks in importing countries. Such factors include: the existence of adequate legislation, regulatory system and well established national distribution system; industry is well organized to carefully manage the production and export of the required types and quantities of pesticides; generic manufacturers comply with international rules and practices; the use of pesticides is decoupled from plant production or agricultural production. The complex issue of pesticide stocks is linked to pest management, crop production, plant protection, usage of the chemicals or food supply chain. And is part of international development and humanitarian aid activities.

2. Consequently, the issue of the obsolete stocks of pesticides bears economic, social and environmental intricacies. A key objective of any international concerted action is to reduce risks from pesticides use. This in turn has multifold implications. It implies the reduction of quantities of pesticides used; to generate less hazardous wastes during production or reformulation or because of the pesticides not being used or improperly used; to reduce costs of pest control; to reduce the hazardousness of pesticides manufactured; to develop biological control systems; to modify agricultural practices and consumers patterns.

II. A ROLE FOR THE BASEL CONVENTION

3. There is an urgent need to solve acute problems today and to build the capacity of developing countries in particular to address the long term solutions. The root causes of the problems are rather well known and a large array of possible solutions exist at all levels. Industry can maintain stewardship on their products, governments can set up the adequate system (legal; procurement) to deal with the matter and regional and international bodies can provide the practical and effective platform to develop preventive programmes and common standards for the protection of health and the environment. Environmentally sound management and prevention of stocks of obsolete pesticides are the key elements of relevance to the Basel Convention.

4. Several activities have been and are carried out in the framework of the Basel Convention that are relevant to the issue of the obsolete stocks of pesticides; in particular it includes the development of methodological tools for the inventories of hazardous wastes (pesticides; industrial chemicals; PCB containing equipment) and the environmentally sound management of such wastes (collection, storage, transport, disposal, after-care of disposal operations) as well as assistance in the drafting or consolidation of national legislations, regulatory and enforcement systems. The existence of a black market in obsolete pesticides is worrying. It is evident that there is a necessity to improve and strengthen the capacity of States in preventing and monitoring

illegal traffic in obsolete stocks of pesticides, a matter for which the Basel Convention is developing procedures and mechanisms.

5. The domain of the environmental problems associated with the constitution of stocks of obsolete pesticides has become more prominent in the Basel Convention recently, through, in particular, requests for assistance made by several developing countries. Because of the nature of the problems described, Parties recognized that there was a need to build-up a multi-stakeholders approach. In this spirit, the Parties have agreed to convene a Continental Conference for Africa on the environmentally sound management of unwanted stocks of hazardous wastes, with emphasis on waste pesticides. The Conference will take place in Morocco from 8-12 January 2001. The fact that a multilateral environmental agreement, like the Basel Convention, gets its grip on the problem provides a new impetus driven by 136 Parties and international legal rules and procedures contributing to the solutions.

III. SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Comprehensive national and regional strategies or plans need to be pursued that contain enabling or supportive measures for which financial support should be guaranteed. Periodic review of such strategies or plans would need to be carried out to adapt to progress, or lack of progress, in solving the problems, or to new partners joining in.

6. It is critical to set in motion such process. The issue of the obsolete stocks of pesticides and their dramatic consequences have not been visible enough in the making of government's development, trade, environment and health policies. A major effort is required to bring awareness of the issue to decision-makers to break the vicious circle. It is important to identify and study the mechanisms that have led to the accumulation of stocks of hazardous wastes, in particular of pesticides. And then to adopt a strategy to eliminate, neutralize or change these mechanisms. Clearly a whole set of measures, such as the existence of an adequate national legislation or of a pesticide registration office or equivalent body to control and monitor import of these materials and their use, are required. The role of external funding or donor agencies, bilateral or multilateral, need to be understood because of their direct involvement in providing grants or loans to purchase pesticides at the request of Governments. Equally important is to get more information on the existing black market in obsolete stocks of pesticides and to find ways to stop such bad practices. As well, the reconstitution of stocks in developing countries after clean-up as a result of the export of bulk pesticides in excess of real needs worsens the already dramatic situation. Export of formulation technologies for pesticides to developing countries is taking place. These additional factors, if not properly controlled, may lead to unsound practices with detrimental effects to health and the environment. Together with the issue of the black market, these other critical factors need to be carefully addressed, so that they will not be part of the problem.

7. The major objective of the world community should be to seek an end to this problem. The challenge is therefore to work together to achieve this ambitious goal. We know that there is a fierce competition for limited resources to fund activities concerning or related to obsolete stocks of unwanted pesticides, persistent organic pollutants and other hazardous chemicals. Nonetheless, thanks to the pioneer work done by FAO and national agencies such as GTZ in

Germany, the international community has gained a reasonable knowledge of the issue and of the magnitude of the problem. Also, the international community has the technical, scientific and financial capacity to deal efficiently with the problem. We know well what has to be done, in particular the need to build up a solid preventive system to avoid further accumulation of stocks of obsolete pesticides.

8. It is only by joining forces, by getting the full participation of industry, that this issue could be dealt with in a meaningful way and timely manner. By investing resources today, we are freeing them for tomorrow and in doing so alleviating a major environmental and health burden, in particular in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. We are facing a problem for which solutions exist. It is time to build up the sort of public/private partnership that would enable us to come to grasp with the dramatic accumulation of hazardous waste all over the world.

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