Professional Qualification for Plant Protection Products Handling in the Czech Republic
(Josef Svaricek, Plant Protection Products Section, State Phytosanitary Administration)

Requirements for professional qualification for Plant Protection Products handling in the Czech Republic are based on the Article 86 of the Act No 326/2004, on Plant Health and Amendments to Certain Related Acts, as last amended.

A natural person or legal entity whose business activity includes storage, sales to consumers, use or direct application of products and/or providing consultancy concerning use of products (hereinafter “product handling”) must employ or contract a professionally qualified natural person for performance of these activities. This provision does not apply to retailing of small packages of products for home and garden use.

A professionally qualified natural person should:

• have the qualification for handling highly toxic PPPs required by the Article 44b) of the Act No 258/2000, on Public Health Protection and Amendment of Certain Related Acts, as last amended
• comply with the conditions of professional qualifications pursuant to Article 82, paragraph 2 of the Act No 326/2004,
• hold a valid certificate of professional competence for handling products acquired on the basis of a successfully passed examination in front of an examination commission pursuant to Article 86, paragraph 5, letter a) of the Act No 326/2004,
• hold a valid certificate of professional competence for handling products, after completion of a professional course in good practice in plant protection and in safe handling of products and a successfully passed examination,

A professionally qualified natural person:

• is responsible to a natural person or legal entity for compliance with the rules of good plant protection practice and safe handling of products minimising the risk of their adverse side effects on human and animal health and the environment,
• shall organise annual training of persons who will directly manipulate with products concerning the rules and shall keep a record of the training for at least three years,
• shall instruct persons that will be directly manipulating with the product about the features and effects of the product and with the methods of its good and safe handling, prior to start of work with every product,
• may act for a natural person or legal entity at negotiations with the state administrative authorities authorized in matters concerning application of products.

Professional courses providing knowledge of good plant protection practice and safe handling of products are held by educational institutions authorised by the Ministry of Agriculture on the basis of a proposal of the State Phytosanitary Administration pursuant to the provision of Article 5, paragraph 2 of
the Act No 326/2004. As concerns knowledge of human health protection, the bodies of the public health protection are authorised by the Ministry of Health in that matter pursuant to Act No. 258/2000. The courses are covering 15 main topics in the overall extent of 40 hours.

Applications for test of professional qualifications (cca 7000 annually), including the administrative fee 200,- Czech crowns (CZK), are submitted to seven regional offices of the State Phytosanitary Administration, which:

- appoints on the basis of agreement with the local institutions of public health protection Commissions for Examination of Professional Qualifications for Handling Products (consists of three qualified experts) and issues the relevant certificates to natural persons that has successfully passed the examination, with the validity of five years from the date of passing the examination,
- keeps records of the authorised educational institutions, passed examinations and issued certificates.

The examination of professional qualification consists of two parts – written test (20 questions) and oral examination (three questions plus possibility of one supplemental question). At least 75 % of right answers is necessary to pass the examination.

Ministerial Decree No 333/2004, on Professional Qualification for the Field of Phytosanitary Care, specifies the technical details, e.g. items of the application for carrying out an examination of professional qualifications, composition of the examination commission, conditions of the examination, requirements for knowledge of the examined persons, methods of issuing and items to be included in the certificates of professional qualifications, the curriculum and scope of a professional course in good plant protection practice and safe handling products, and requirements for the educational institutions authorised for organisation of the courses.
CropLife’s network of Associations in over 90 countries...

Integrated Pest Management & Responsible Use

- The responsible use of crop protection products is undertaken within the context of promoting an IPM strategy.
- It is premised on the belief that a crop protection product should only be used when necessary – as little as possible, as much as necessary.
- That Responsible Use is part of IPM is implicit in the FAO Code of Conduct for the Distribution and Use of Pesticides which describes IPM as:
  “The careful consideration of all available pest control techniques and subsequent integration of appropriate measures that discourage the development of pest populations and keep pesticides and other interventions to levels that are economically justified and reduce or minimize risk to human health and the environment...”
IPM & Responsible Use: Change in behaviour

- Lecture
- Training & Visit
- Participatory Training
- Combination: Radio, literature, participatory etc.

Shift from Lecture to Participatory training

- Mobile training units
- Mass media – community radio, television, newspapers
- Printed material – brochures, posters
- Practical application – ‘learning by doing’
- Community drama
- Competitions – children drawing
- Follow-up and Community participation

IPM and Responsible Use: Achievements

- Industry participation in 80+ countries
- Over 3 million trained since 1991
- In 2005, 300,000 people trained (including 4000 trainers) in circa 30 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America;
- Participation in programmes in developed countries, e.g. certification schemes
- Independent audits show change in attitude and behaviour amongst farmers
  - Lessons learnt on improved training methodologies and monitoring behaviour change – will be incorporated in all programmes, participatory approach
- A growing number of multi-stakeholder partnerships e.g., IFAD, USEPA, Worldview network, USAID, IFDC, GTZ, AVRDC,
  governmental bodies – outreach & impact.
'Global' training programmes 2005

Training numbers - 2003

Impact: Adoption of IPM Practices (% farmers – Guatemala)
Impact: Number of Applications per Season (India)

Impact: Use of Protective Clothing (% farmers – India)

Training Guidelines
Local Guidelines/Material

Local Guidelines/Material
Industry stewardship worker safety and training programmes

European Safe Use Initiative
An industry approach in collaboration with main stakeholders

Hans Faller European Safe Use Initiative 21st March 2007, Brno Czech Republic

Aim of the Safe Use Initiative

- Label compliance
- Reduction of potential operator exposure by innovative application techniques
- Reduction of dermal and inhalation exposures by appropriate PPE and its proper use
- Reduction of the environmental impact by container rinsing

Hans Faller European Safe Use Initiative 21st March 2007, Brno Czech Republic

Pilot Project Spain

Kick-off period of 3 years (mid 2002 – mid 2005)

Hans Faller European Safe Use Initiative 21st March 2007, Brno Czech Republic
Almeria area

About 20,000 growers cultivate 35,000 ha of vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, beans, etc.) under plastic.

Measures

Baseline/Progress survey
Symposium/Exhibitions
Training
Novel spray equipment

Safe Use

Communication campaign
PPE
Label text
Network

Baseline survey 2002

200 growers/operators were observed and interviewed by the professional Market research institute Markin Spain.

- Observation
- Face to face interview
Success factors

- From the baseline survey 30 success factors have been derived.
- In order to monitor progress the success factors have been measured again in spring 2005.

12 safety messages

From the baseline survey 12 safety messages have been derived.

The safety messages are repeatedly used in the communication campaign.

Communication campaign

- Awareness campaign
  - Billboards/Poster
  - Radio
  - Advertising/Press releases
  - Farmer Exhibitions
- Technical campaign
  - Brochure/leaflets
  - Calendar
  - Web site
  - Video
Billboards

40 billboards were placed in the Almeria region

Calendar

5000 Calendar 2004 with 12 safety messages were distributed via retailers and dealers to farmers

Web site www.cosechavida.com
Farmer exhibitions

Training

- Training and certification of farmers is mandatory in Spain
- There are 60 official trainers in Almería
- Up to 2007 almost all 20,000 have been trained and certified

Training

The 12 safety messages were integrated in the official and mandatory "Junta of Andalusia" training programme for pesticides handlers
Spray equipment

The mostly used application equipment is the spray gun

Hans Feller
European San Va Intiative
21st March 2007, Brno, Czech Republic

Reduction of potential exposure by novel application technology

Compared to spray gun application:

- 25 times less
- 70 times less

Hans Feller
European San Va Intiative
21st March 2007, Brno, Czech Republic

Coverall evaluation

24 different coveralls have been laboratory tested according to European Norma (EN)

9 different coveralls have been field tested concerning comfort, price, design, etc. in tomatoes and pepper

4 different coveralls have been field tested in pepper measuring the residues on cotton underwear (whole body inner dosimeters)

Hans Feller
European San Va Intiative
21st March 2007, Brno, Czech Republic
Coverall recommendation

Progress survey 2005

- The same 200 growers/operators were observed and interviewed by the professional Market research institute MARKIN as in the baseline survey 2002
- In order to measure success, 30 factors from the baseline survey were compared with the progress survey
- All 30 factors showed a positive trend

Some success factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor (in % of 200 growers observed and interviewed)</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mix/load: Gloves worn (observation)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix/load: Contamination unprotected hands</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application: Coveralls worn (observation)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application: Boots worn (observation)</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application: Contamination of unprotected ears and legs</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of novel spray technology</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reported intoxications in Almeria region

Intoxications decreased from 98 reported cases in 2002 to 68 in 2004

SUI roll-out 2005-2007

Main issue: protective clothing

Selection of fabric from Greek and Portuguese manufacturers

Laboratory tests at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, USA

Comfort trials by farmers in the field

Exposure trials by operators in the field

Recommendation & Certification
Lab tests of coverall fabrics

Data source: Prof. A. Shaw

% Penetration vs fabric weight

- cotton drill
- nylon canvas
- polyester/cotton
- polyester
- nylon
- cotton
- cotton/polyester
- polyester/cotton
- cotton/terylene
- polyester/terylene

American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) 201
0.2 ml.

Actual protective clothing work frame

European agricultural standard for protective clothing (DIN 32781)

DIN 32781 certification of protective clothing in test facility

Manufacturing of DIN 32781 certified protective clothing

Availability of DIN 32781 certified protective clothing in dealer shops

European Safe Use Initiative
21st March 2007, Brno, Czech Republic
What is COPA-COGEC?

1. What is COPA-COGEC?

COPA-COGEC represents:
- over 15 million people working on EU farm holdings either full-time or part-time and
- more than 40,000 cooperatives

COPA-COGEC has more than:
- 70 Member Organisations from all EU Member States

2. How is COPA-COGEC organised?

COPA-COGEC’s task is to defend the general interests of agriculture and to look for solutions that are in the common interest. This is done by getting all COPA-COGEC member organisations to reach a common position on an issue of common interest.
The COPA-COGECO presentation today is the reflection of the EU farming community as a whole: from North to South, from organic farmers, wine producers to cereal growers, from seed multipliers to forest owners ....

The specific part on training was developed by the employers organisation GEOPA with their EU Partner representing the workers in agriculture (EFA)

**Main topics to be discussed**

**Risk reduction through workers safety and training**

- **Agriculture and the environment**: Commission draft proposal for a frame work directive on the sustainable use of PPP.
- **Agriculture and the access to PPP**: Commission draft proposal for a regulation on the placing of the market of PPP.
- **Agriculture and the safety of the operators**: EU Instruction manual for spray operators of PPP.

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**I. Agriculture and the Environment**

COPA-COGECO’s reaction to commission’s draft proposal for a frame work directive on the sustainable use of pesticides.
I. Agriculture and the Environment

COPA and COGECA members want to stress that the issue of environmental protection in general and sustainable use of pesticides/plant protection products in particular is of great importance to them.

EU farmers have undertaken numerous and various measures and programmes to maintain the environment in a healthy state (buffer zones, voluntary schemes, ...).

A great deal has already been achieved by EU farmers and they are committed to continue their efforts in this direction.

1. Risk reduction and prevention

Risk reduction: Positive approach as the strategy focuses on risk reduction and not on volume - however the proposal lacks options for developing alternative strategies.

Training: is essential - however only basic training should be provided for by the Directive, thus not supplementing what is being done by Member States.

Testing of equipment: Directive should avoid listing requirements too specifically as conditions of use and types of equipment vary considerably.

2. Information and data

Awareness programmes: information should not only cover environment and health aspect of PPP but also why PPP are used and what are their benefits.

Indicators: needed to make data comparable throughout EU. Collection of data should be extended to development and evolution of pest/disease/weeds/lung allowing to anticipate emerging diseases.
II. Agriculture and the access to PPP

COPA-COGECA's reaction to commission's draft proposal for a Regulation for placing on the market of PPP.

II. Agriculture and the access to PPP

It is important at this stage to remind that chemicals are used in agriculture as PPP to eliminate unwanted organisms.

These products are used to protect crops against weeds, insect pest and keep crops healthy thus also contribute to food quality and safety by ensuring their marketability.

They provide benefits not only in agriculture but also in horticulture, forestry and gardening.

They are highly regulated and their placing on the market is subject to strict rules.

Key Messages: Agriculture and access to PPP

1. Risk assessment by EFSA

COPA and COGECA particularly welcome the PPP proposal, as it is a:
- Regulation and not a Directive, thus ensuring a uniform and harmonised application throughout the EU;
- Aims at reinforcing the high level of protection of human health and the environment;
- Updates the procedures, in particular to take account of the creation of the European Food Safety Authority, thus ensuring that EU legislation continues to be based on sound science.
2. Simplified procedure for low risk substances

COPA and COGECA welcome the introduction of a simplified procedure for 'low-risk' substances and plant protection products. They consider however a definition of low risk should be provided for.

Moreover, COPA and COGECA believe that this procedure should be extended to non-pathogenic microbial PPP (or Biological Control Agents – BCA) and to traditional low risk phytosanitary products.

III. Agriculture and the safety of the operators

EU Instruction manual:

- "Instructions for spray operators"
  Spraying Methods, the environment and safety

III. Agriculture and the safety of operators

A handbook has been jointly produced in 2001 by GEOPA and the EFA and sets out what they regard as the main guidelines which operators must be familiar with before spraying PPP.

This handbook is meant as a tool for all persons who through their work are in contact with pesticides, i.e. those who deliver, buy or deal, mix or use PPP, etc.

It provides an overview of the applicable law, information about handling PPP and their effects on health and the environment, and a lot more.

European Commission supported this initiative.
1. Legislation

Legislation, regulations and codes of practice as regards the safe use of pesticides vary a great deal between countries. European directives in this area, based on the ILO Convention (which is generally accepted as the fundamental instrument regarding health and safety), require the exposure of workers to hazardous pesticides to be eliminated or reduced. This can be achieved by a step-by-step process: Starting with risk assessment and ending with training of employees.

2. PPP Handling

Risk assessment and safety regulations on:
- Storage
- Disposal of remnants and empty containers
- Transport of PPP
- Toxicity classes and symbols

3. The working environment

First aid
Choice of personal protective equipment (PPE)
Suppliers instructions
Workplace instructions
The spraying operations
4. **PPP**

Description of the types and function of PPP
- Climatic influence
- Action periods / harvesting periods
- Use of additives
- Mixing procedures

5. **Environmental impact**

PPP in the environment:
- Pollution risks
- Impact of PPP on plants and animals

6. **Spraying**

Spraying technique
- Cleaning and maintenance
- Use of protective equipment (PPE)
- Nozzles
- Waste management
7. Alternatives to PPP

e.g.: IPM
- mechanical weed control
- observation and warning systems
- biological pest control
- etc.

CONCLUSION

COPA – COGECA:
- Welcome that legislation is based on risk reduction and not reduction of volume.
  This implies automatically a reduction of risk for the operator and ensures safety at work.

- States that initial training is basic,...
  but continuous attention to safety is vital.

- Risk reduction is common sense.
Workers’ safety training: An ILO perspective

by Ann Herbert, Agriculture specialist, International Labour Organization

About a year and a half ago, as part of a training programme for labour inspectors on safety and health in agriculture, trainees and instructors went out on a field trip to visit two enterprises: one a sugar cane plantation, the other a commercial rice farm. During both visits, we were invited to observe workers applying pesticides.

In the first case, a team of sprayers were at work, with each man wearing a backpack sprayer and working in a designated part of the field, a certain distance from the others. Shortly after we arrived, their spray packs needed to be refilled so the four men gathered round the large plastic vat which held the pesticide and the large plastic tub with the water needed to dilute the product. Each was wearing cotton coveralls, rubber boots, rubber gloves, a respirator and eye shields. The one responsible for mixing the solution donned a protective apron and methodically diluted the product to the proper level and with assistance from his team mates they carefully poured the solution into the sprayers, sealed the containers, put their packs back on, and went back to work. It was clear from the methodical way they worked, from the fact that each man carried out his duties at the appropriate time and in an attentive, but natural way, that they were not putting on a safety demonstration, but were simply carrying out their normal tasks under the eye of some outside visitors. Earlier, we had seen the company changing facilities, laundry room and showers, where workers changed out of their protective clothing, left their coveralls for laundering, showered and dressed in their own clothes before going home.

Just a few kilometres away, on the rice farm, we observed a rather different scene. There the man applying the pesticide was dressed in a pair of shorts and a string T-shirt. He had a pair of flip-flops with him and had tied a bandana over his nose ostensibly to protect himself from the spray. He too was working with a backpack sprayer and as he walked between the rows of rice, he made a wide sweeping movement with his arm, cutting an arc of almost 270 degrees. As he progressed through the field, ever further downwind, he was, in effect, passing constantly through a pesticide shower – first, the one he had just sprayed, and later, the drift from his earlier passage a few rows upwind. When it came time to refill the pack, he mixed the solution in a bucket, next to a small gully and would either dip the bucket or a ladle into the gully water to dilute and stir the product. As he poured the solution into his backpack sprayer, there was considerable sloshing down the outside of the pack, which was perched precariously on the edge of the gully. He then swung the pack onto his back and continued with his work.

Only a few kilometres separated these two scenes, but they were a world apart in terms of safety management in agriculture. In the first case, the enterprise was aware of the hazards of pesticide use and had set up standard procedures to minimize the risks that workers faced in the course of their work. Workers were trained to follow safe work procedures and supervised to ensure compliance. The enterprise took its responsibilities seriously in terms of providing appropriate protective equipment, ensuring that it was properly used and maintained, and providing laundry and shower facilities to minimize the opportunity for pesticide traces to be borne home to their employees’ families. They kept track of work schedules to avoid over-exposure and provided regular health checkups to those who worked with pesticides. Needless to say, none of these precautions were evident on the rice farm.

Almost every time I travel in a developing country, when the subject of pesticides is raised, I hear an account that generally unfolds along these lines. “We had a sad case of a poisoning here not too long ago. A small child took a drink from a coke bottle and died a terrible death. The parents are distraught and can’t stop blaming themselves. They never imagined their little one would die from drinking a pesticide. It’s really tragic. Something should be done.”
I believe that we are gathered here today because we all agree that “something should be done” to minimize the possibility of illness and death resulting from the use (or misuse) of pesticides. I’ve been invited to tell you briefly about the work of the International Labour Organization in this domain. In the time allotted to me, I will try to give you a picture, painted in rather broad brushstrokes of the philosophy of our approach, the policy framework which we encourage, and some of the practical activities that we undertake with our constituents.

When I say “constituents”, I’m referring to our 179 member States and to the representative organizations of employers and workers that are active in each of these. Unlike other inter-governmental organizations, ILO is tripartite in its composition, governance structures and philosophy. Employers and workers’ organizations have an equal voice with governments in determining policies and programmes of the organization and in adopting international normative instruments, that is, the Conventions and Recommendations, which collectively are known as international labour standards.

The basic philosophy of the ILO boils down to a few key principles. Among these are tripartism and social dialogue which imbue the work of the ILO. They are seen as important means of achieving the overall objective of the Organization, which is to ensure that women and men have the opportunity to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

Occupational safety and health has been a very fruitful area for social dialogue. International labour standards on occupational safety and health set out policy frameworks and encourage management processes, which can be developed and applied both at the national level as well as within enterprises. They also set out the respective responsibilities of public authorities, employers and workers in their implementation. This is true, for example, of the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170) as well as the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184). It is also true of the ILO Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems (ILO-OSH 2001).

The overall approach of these instruments is to aim for systemic, rather than piecemeal improvements. Their principal method is to bring together those responsible for various parts of the solution to interact with each other, to consult each other and to cooperate in developing and implementing appropriate legal and policy frameworks as well as the control systems needed to make work safe.

Unlike some technical standards that are largely science-based, ILO standards focus on the human aspects of building safe systems: the legal architecture, the regulatory framework, enforcement procedures, the definition of roles and responsibilities among government agencies, employers and workers, management processes, not to mention the need for information-sharing, broad awareness-raising, and of course the training of workers.

We can see in practice how a few of these threads are intertwined in a key technical area such as the safe management of chemicals. The Chemicals Convention of 1990 provides that the competent authority shall establish systems and criteria for the classification of chemicals according to the type and degree of hazards they present, in accordance with national or international standards. All chemicals shall be marked, and in addition, all hazardous chemicals shall be labelled in a way that is easily understandable to workers as regards their classification, the hazards they present and the safety precautions to be observed. Chemical safety data sheets for hazardous chemicals shall be provided to employers.

Suppliers of chemicals, whether they are manufacturers, importers or distributors, are responsible for ensuring that such chemicals have been properly classified and marked, that the hazardous chemicals that they supply are labelled and that chemical safety sheets are prepared and provided to employers.
Employers, in turn, must ensure that all chemicals used at work are labelled or marked, that any necessary precautions are taken when they are used, and that records are maintained of the hazardous chemicals used at the workplace, cross-referenced to the appropriate chemical safety data sheets. This record shall be accessible to all workers concerned and to their representatives. Notice this aspect of communication of information among the concerned parties.

Employers are responsible for monitoring and recording the exposure of workers to hazardous chemicals and ensuring that they are not exposed to chemicals in excess of the exposure limits. They are responsible for carrying out risk assessments and for taking action to eliminate or minimize the risk through the choice of chemicals used, the choice of technology, the adoption of appropriate working systems and practices, the use of adequate engineering controls and where these do not suffice, through the provision and maintenance of personal protective equipment and clothing at no cost to the worker.

Importantly, employers have the duty to inform workers of the hazards they face in the workplace in terms of chemical exposure, to instruct workers on how to use the information provided on labels and chemical safety data sheets, to use the chemical safety data sheets as the basis for their instructions to workers, and finally to train workers on a continuing basis in the practices and procedures to be followed for safety in the use of chemicals at work. These employers’ duties are mirrored by workers’ rights to information on the identity and properties of chemicals used at work and the precautionary measures to be taken; as well as workers’ right to education and training.

Employers and workers have reciprocal responsibilities to cooperate as closely as possible with each other with respect to safety in the use of chemicals at work. Workers additionally have a duty to comply with all chemical safety procedures and practices.

Let us think back now to the sugar cane plantation and to the rice farm. Think about how conscientiously the sugar cane workers protected themselves through the adoption of safe work methods. This was not due to chance, nor to the individual initiative of any one of them. It was clearly the result of a management system that took safety and health seriously. The employers provided information and training to the workforce, ensured that safe work practices became standard practice and made certain that the workers properly used the personal protective equipment provided to them. The employers backed this up with occupational hygiene measures. Workers and employers cooperated to minimize workers’ exposure to chemical hazards and thereby protected their health, and the health of their families.

Now think back to the sprayer in the rice field and consider what the absence of a chemical management system means. An individual worker, particularly in a developing country, may know that he is carrying out potentially dangerous work, but he will not have the means to work safely unless a system is in place to provide the necessary protections. Alone, he will lack basic information about the hazards he faces, he will be unaware of the safe work practices he needs to adopt, he will probably be unable to afford the personal protective equipment needed and would not be instructed in its use and maintenance. In the case I witnessed, the bandana over his nose was the man’s only protection.

Let us now step outside of the formal world of work, outside of an employment relationship and recall the child with the coke bottle. This too is an example of what the absence of a chemical management system can mean, but here we are talking about the lack of control over a chemical supply chain along which pesticides flow from the point of importation to the home of the ultimate user. In many countries, particularly poor developing countries, chemicals are imported in bulk and as they move down the distribution chain they are transferred from larger to smaller containers, until finally the small farmer buys a certain quantity of chemicals poured into whatever container he has brought from home. There is no label to indicate the name of the product, the level of toxicity, the proper dilution, nor the precautions to respect. He simply takes the jar or bottle home.
The WHO estimates that there are between two and five million pesticide poisonings each year, approximately 40,000 of which are fatal. Many of these are in developing countries. I am sure that we agree that “Something should be done”. But what? And by whom?

The answer, I believe, will involve many parties. For its part, the ILO has focused on raising the profile of OSH issues, and pushing them higher up the political agenda of its member States. Over the past four years, the International Labour Conference, which brings together roughly 3000 representatives of governments, employers and workers’ organizations, has adopted two major initiatives in this area: first, a global strategy which places considerable emphasis on promotion, awareness raising, advocacy and the dissemination of knowledge – and in particular to vulnerable workers and those in the informal economy; and second, a Promotional Framework Convention, adopted in 2006, based on the concept of continuous improvement of national occupational safety and health systems – in a sense, taking a management systems approach to the national level.

ILO has also worked with our tripartite constituents in a number of countries to develop training programmes both for agricultural enterprises, involving both safety manager and worker safety representatives, as well as for small farmers in rural communities. These stress the need for safe transport, handling, storage and disposal of chemicals. Agricultural employers and agricultural trade unions have been strong partners, strong message-bearers, in these efforts.

But when we talk about spreading a safety consciousness to a wider public, and in particular to small farmers, additional partners are needed. I have seen the thirst for information in rural communities in developing countries and can see opportunities for collaboration at various levels. There is clearly a need for greater collaboration among public agencies at the national and local levels that may not have worked together in this area before, for example, public health clinics, local schools, veterinary services, agricultural extension agencies, along with local community groups, farmers’ associations and rural workers’ organizations. International agencies working in agriculture and rural development could pool their efforts for greater impact, through technical cooperation activities. OECD countries could share their experience and expertise in chemical management systems with developing countries.

Today we hear a lot about corporate social responsibility and about public/private partnerships. Indeed, private companies have a key role to play in raising safety awareness. Suppliers of agrichemicals could use their commercial distribution channels as conduits of information, making sure that their distributors provide safety information along with the products they sell. They could ensure that their products are available pre-packaged in small quantities and clearly marked so that end-users would know what they were buying and how to use it properly. And they could tap the power of the market place to deliver potent safety messages. Agrichemical firms could earn the respect of their clients by delivering safety information through radio programmes, trade fairs, and their company’s own extension and training services.

Much of the work of the International Labour Organization in the area of safe management of chemicals has focused on developing systematic approaches to handling workplace challenges and using social dialogue to achieve this. This will continue to be the case, but if we are to move towards creating a preventive safety culture, this dialogue needs to be much wider. There’s a role for all of us to play and many voices need to be heard.