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REPORT ON ENHANCING INFORMATION SHARING ON CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY

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FOREWORD

This report reviews the types of information being collected on consumer product safety and the ways that the information is being shared with stakeholders and across jurisdictions. It identifies ways that information sharing can be strengthened and presents a ten point action plan for improving the situation. The report was approved and declassified by the Committee on Consumer Policy in May 2010.

Please note that this report does not necessarily reflect the views of OECD member countries or other parties participating in the work.

SUMMARY

The attached report examines ways that information sharing on consumer product safety could be enhanced internationally. It is presented in five parts. Part I describes the types of information that are being compiled on product safety issues. Part II examines issues related to the comparability of information being collected. Part III reports on current information-sharing arrangements. Part IV identifies how the current information-sharing efforts could be strengthened. Part V provides a series of specific proposals that could be considered in the short, medium and long terms. A summary of the proposals is contained in Box 1.

Box 1. Summary of actions that could be taken to strengthen information sharing on product safety

Short-term actions

- 1) Pool information on recalls and emergency alerts on a single website.
- 2) Develop mechanisms to co-ordinate international product safety initiatives more effectively.
- 3) Support regional and global fora: will help to *i)* increase understanding of domestic differences, *ii)* promote harmonisation of standards, *iii)* flag emerging issues.

Medium-term actions

- 4) Provide web access to studies of hazards.
- 5) Provide web access to updates on regulatory activities.
- 6) Establish restricted web directory of safety experts.

Longer-term actions

- 7) Reach agreement on format for injury data collection.
- 8) Pool information on product hazards on a web-based platform.
- 9) Develop confidentiality protocol for sharing research information.
- 10) Enhance international co-operation on traceability.

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ENHANCING CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY INFORMATION SHARING

Introduction

What are the issues?

A series of recent incidents worldwide have resulted in increasing concerns about the safety of consumer products. Such concerns arise in two basic ways: *i)* when products do not meet safety standards or are dangerously defective or *ii)* when products are used in ways that pose safety risks. The latter is especially challenging since many, if not most, products could potentially be used in ways that cause injury. Risks are higher in this regard when awareness of safety issues is inadequate or when information on the use of the product is not complete or clear. Some groups, such as children, may be more vulnerable as they may, for example, not be able to fully understand safety instructions and their ability to adhere to safety guidelines may be limited.

The principal challenges facing product safety agencies are four-fold: *i)* detecting products which pose safety risks, *ii)* evaluating the magnitude and scope of the risks that the products pose, *iii)* managing the response (*e.g.*, when needed, handling their removal from the market), and *iv)* sharing information across- borders and with other stakeholders.

Addressing product safety issues has become more complex as a result of increased international trade in consumer products. There are two key points to be made in this regard. First, product safety standards and enforcement differ markedly across economies, which complicates consumer protection efforts. A product considered safe in one jurisdiction may be considered unsafe in another due to differences in standards and/or the concept of what constitutes an unsafe product. Second, detection of safety problems can be complicated when products are imported. While customs authorities are in a good position to screen products, their ability to do so is in reality quite limited given *i)* the volume of products crossing borders, *ii)* the time and expense that would be involved in unpacking and inspecting items packed in containers and *iii)* the expertise that would be required to make any determinations on the safety of a product based only on a visual inspection.

There are also challenges associated with the growing role of e-commerce. While e-commerce provides consumers with more choice and greater bargaining power, it also provides a means through which rogue business operators can sell sub-standard, unsafe products to unsuspecting consumers. The nature of e-commerce often makes it difficult for consumers to establish the legitimacy of sellers. Moreover, they are not in a position to easily evaluate the quality and genuineness of the products that e-commerce vendors are selling.

What is being done to address the issues? What else needs to be done?

Common international standards and agreement on the concept of what would constitute safe and unsafe products would provide avenues for addressing some of the challenges facing product safety agencies, and there are a number of areas where this has been pursued. Currently, however, there are considerable differences among countries, and this is likely to continue to be the case as reaching consensus is difficult and when it occurs, it can often only be achieved at a general level. Other avenues for tackling the challenges include sharing information on emerging problems and, when possible, co-ordinating enforcement actions.

On the information-sharing front, countries have developed a range of multilateral and bilateral mechanisms over the past several decades. These formal and informal arrangements have contributed to

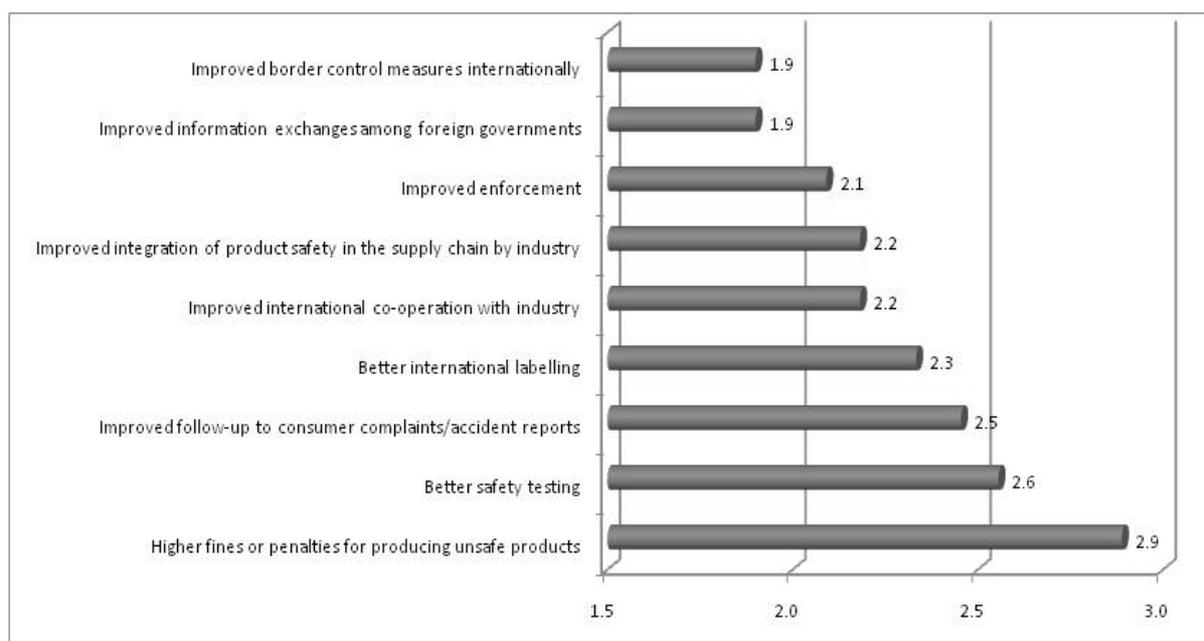
greater cross-border co-operation. However, the information has been exchanged between and among a limited number of economies and regions; moreover, national laws often limit the kinds of information which can be exchanged; the limitations often concern issues related to intellectual property and data protection laws, confidentiality and liability rules affecting civil servants, protection of on-going investigations or legal proceedings and information-sharing reciprocity (ICPSC, 2007). Even when information is generally available, language barriers may limit its utility.

There is evidence, however, that restrictions are being relaxed. In the United States, for example, the US Congress passed the *Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act* (CPSIA) in 2008, which allows the sharing of confidential information with foreign regulators (Section 207 of the CPSIA). Previously the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) could only exchange certain general information on recalled products.

Beyond the ability to exchange information, there are challenges associated with the comparability of information. The way data are collected and evaluated varies from one country to another, complicating cross-border exchanges. There are also challenges linked to the identification of the origin (traceability) of products, which would facilitate the international information exchange.

The need for improved information sharing is well recognised among governments. This was highlighted in a 2008 survey carried out by the OECD, which ranked it and more effective border control measures as the areas requiring the highest priority attention (Figure 1). As discussed at the International Consumer Product and Health Safety Organisation (ICPHSO) meeting in Orlando, in 2007, co-operation needs to include authorities at various levels. National and regional authorities, for example, should actively participate in international *fora*.

Figure 1. Addressing product safety issues more effectively internationally



Note: Figures represent the average rankings of 13 survey respondents where "1" indicated an area where action was urgently needed, "2" indicated an area where action was of high priority, "3" represented an area where action was not urgent and "4" indicated an area where action was not needed.

Source: OECD, 2008.

What is the purpose of this project?

In 2008, the OECD Committee on Consumer Policy (CCP) organised a Roundtable on Consumer Product Safety (see www.oecd.org/sti/consumer-policy/productsafety) which brought together representatives from government, business and civil society to discuss emerging product safety issues, focusing on non-food items. In follow-up, the Committee decided to carry out an analytic review of existing information-sharing mechanisms, with a view towards identifying ways that information-sharing could be improved.

The results of the research are presented in this document. They are based, in part, on a survey that was carried out with OECD member and certain non-member economies, as well as a number of international organisations that are active in the product safety field. As with previous work, the scope is limited to non-food products, including cosmetics but excluding pharmaceuticals. The report is presented in five parts. Part I describes the types of information that are being compiled on product safety issues. Part II examines issues related to the comparability of information being collected. Part III reports on current information-sharing arrangements. Part IV identifies how the current information-sharing efforts could be strengthened. Part V provides a series of specific proposals that could be considered in the short, medium and long terms. Annex I provides an overview of information mechanisms in a number of jurisdictions.

I. Collection and availability of information on product safety

Information on product safety is collected by numerous governmental and non-governmental bodies. The type of information collected depends on the nature and objectives of the organisation. Some of the collected information is made accessible to the public.

Product recalls

Product recalls are undertaken by firms on a voluntary basis when a safety or health issue arises, or they can be mandated by a government. In most instances, firms are required to notify governments of any recalls. Governments, in turn, often share information on recalls with the public. In the European Union, for example, information on recalls is provided by member countries to the Rapid Alert System for non-food consumer products (RAPEX).¹ The information is then made available on the Internet (http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex_archives_en.cfm). Similar systems have been set up, or are being established in many other countries, including Canada (www.healthcanada.gc.ca/cps-recalls), the United States (www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prerel.html) and Mexico (where a system will soon be operational). The databases can generally be searched in various ways, including by key word, chronologically or according to various criteria (such as by product type, company, hazard and geographical origin).

Public authorities are not the only bodies which collect and disseminate information on product recalls. Consumer associations, family associations, or insurance agencies can be also involved. The French monthly magazine «*Que choisir*», for example, includes a section on «Recalls of the month», which includes information on the recalled products and ways to return them. There are also websites devoted to the recall of products (e.g., the French website www.rappelsproduits.fr.)

Product testing results

Consumer product safety testing is conducted in a variety of ways in countries. Government agencies may take the lead, but firms, independent laboratories and consumer organisations often play an important role. The extent to which test results are shared with interested parties varies. Consumer organisations, for example, tend to share the results of their testing with the public more openly than governments and firms, which may be subject to legal or confidentiality constraints. In Sweden, testing is carried out by different authorities, but is not aggregated and in Canada, Health Canada tests consumer goods, with a focus on specific regulated products, but testing also takes place as a result of investigating complaints.

Injuries

Private and public authorities are actively engaged in the collection of information on injuries associated with the use of consumer products. In the United States, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has established a National Injury Information Clearing House which aggregates and disseminates statistics and information relating to the prevention of death and injury associated with consumer products (Box 2). Information is available to the public. In support of the database, individuals can provide information on injuries or death involving a product (and on products which are otherwise considered unsafe), by filing an online Consumer Product Incident Report (www.cpsc.gov/cgibin/incident.aspx).

¹ The system does not cover food, pharmaceutical and medical devices as they are covered by other mechanisms.

Box 2. Components of the US National Injury Information Clearing House

The National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS)

The system comprises a sample of hospitals that are statistically representative of hospital emergency rooms nationwide. From the data collected, estimates can be made of the numbers of injuries treated in hospital departments that are associated with consumer products. Data is collected on a broad range of injury-related issues, covering hundreds of product categories, and provides national estimates of the number and severity of product-related injuries.

Death Certificate File

For deaths involving the use of a consumer product, a death certificate is provided to CPSC through state health departments. The Clearinghouse provides summaries of these, with victim information removed.

In-Depth Investigations (INDP) File

This file contains summaries of reports of investigations into events surrounding product-related injuries or incidents. Based on victim/witness interviews, the reports provide details about incident sequence, human behaviour, and what products were involved.

Injury/Potential Injury Incident File (IPII)

This file contains summaries, indexed by consumer product, of Hotline reports, product-related newspaper accounts, reports from medical examiners and letters to CPSC.

Source: CPSC, www.cpsc.gov/ABOUT/clrnghse.html.

In the European Union, the Commission (DG SANCO) hosts an Injury Database (IDB) where data from selected emergency departments of Member State hospitals is stored and presented. This complements existing data sources, such as routine causes of death statistics, hospital discharge registers and other data sources specific to injury areas, including road accidents and accidents at work (see <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/idb>). The purpose of the database is to facilitate targeted injury prevention and improve consumer safety in the Member States and at EU level by contributing to a comprehensive overview of the injury spectrum within the Community, and to facilitate comparisons among Member States, through trans-national aggregation and harmonisation of data, and through reporting and identification of best practice. For example, France, which participates in the IDB, has its own monitoring programme, which is overseen by the *Institut de veille sanitaire* (www.invs.sante.fr). Data is collected on epidemiology and accidents at the domestic level, from eleven French hospitals.

In Korea, information is collected by the Korean Consumer Agency (KCA) via an Internet-based injury information system and a telephone hotline. The Consumer Safety Centre of the KCA designated 83 hospitals and fire stations across the nation as injury information submitting agencies. Approximately 35 000 cases of injury information are collected annually.

In Chile, the non-governmental organisation National Aid Corporation for Burned Children (COANIQUEM) has experience in carrying out studies on products that can cause burns. It also reports on incidents involving scalding and burnings, and the causes. The sources of the information are clinic files and admission interviews.

Reports on market surveillance activities

Information related to product safety is evaluated regularly and is often presented in written reports, some of which are made available to the public. In Israel, the Commissioner of Standardization oversees a market surveillance programme through which adherence to mandatory standards are established through sampling. The work plan includes the development of risk analysis criteria in order to improve the efficiency of the market surveillance system. Some information pertaining to public playgrounds and the condition of equipment appears on the Ministry's website. In addition to the sampling, the engineers of the Standardization Administration also investigate *ad hoc* complaints by consumers and competitors. These may make up as much as 15-20 % of their total annual product inspection.

In the European Union, according to Regulation 765/2008 on accreditation and market surveillance, Member States are required to prepare and implement market surveillance programmes; Directive 2001/95 on general product safety also encourages this. However, these programmes concern the countries' future activities. Some information on market surveillance activities are collected for the European Consumer Markets Scoreboard; this includes information on the total budget for product safety market surveillance, the number of inspectors and the number of dangerous products found. Moreover, the RAPEX Monthly and Annual Report contains statistics on the most concerned product categories, the most frequent risks and the most active notifying countries, at the EU level.

In Turkey, annual reports on market surveillance are prepared by market surveillance authorities. The reports include information on the number of products inspected, the number of unsafe and non compliant products found, fines imposed for non-compliances and the number of products tested. The information is gathered from inspections and testing carried out on the products and interviews with the businesses under inspection.

Emerging product safety hazards

In the European Union, some information on emerging safety hazards may become available through RAPEX notifications of dangerous consumer products from Member States, or at an earlier stage in meetings of expert groups. Further information on emerging product safety hazards at the EU level may also be brought forward by the independent Scientific Committee established by the European Commission. In France, the identification of emerging risks appears in scientific studies, the results of which are often published. In addition, France's Consumer Safety Commission (CSC) alerts the public to potential risks of goods and services through advisories posted on its website (www.securiteconso.org). In Canada, the Consumer Product Safety Directorate of Health Canada has an on-going gathering and analysis of data on emerging issues.

Product bans

Products which are unsafe may be banned in a country. In New Zealand, information on such bans is compiled and published by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, on the agency's website (www.consumeraffairs.govt.nz/productsafety/currentbans.html). A similar list is maintained by Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission (www.productsafety.gov.au).

Product standards

References to product safety standards are often accessible through the websites of product safety agencies. Examples include:

- Australia: Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/268595)
- New Zealand: Ministry of Consumer Affairs (www.consumeraffairs.govt.nz/productsafety/standards/index.html)
- United States: Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/regs.aspx)

In the European Union, the standards are published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

II. Comparability of product safety information

At present there are a number of issues that complicate the comparison of product safety information among countries. The lack of consistency in definitions across countries and the different manners in which information is classified are major issues, but there are also a series of other factors which complicate comparisons. These factors include cultural differences and differences in regulations and standards.

Definitions and data classification

National systems

The approaches that countries use to classify product safety data vary significantly. In some, such as Turkey, extensive product coding systems have been developed. In others, coding is rare, often making it difficult to identify related items.

Classification and coding also depend on the kinds of data collected, for example:

- For **product safety recalls**, classification is generally available on the basis of product types, brand and manufacturer name, type of risk, and product origin. In addition, information regarding units sold and sales period, along with the measures taken by the business, are sometimes provided.
- Data on **injuries** is collected from a number of sources, such as hospitals, media or individuals. Therefore, its classification can vary within countries as well as from one country to another.

International systems

Although there is a wide range of consumer product safety classification systems in operation worldwide, there are also a number of internationally recognised classification methods. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has systems in place for injury categorisation; these are widely used by product safety agencies. Moreover there are a number of classification systems which, while not specific to product safety, are being used by some countries in the product safety area to describe products in a uniform manner. The international systems are important as they can help to enhance the comparability of data across countries, while overcoming language barriers (to the extent that numeric coding systems are used).

World Health Organisation (WHO)

International Classification of External Causes of Injuries (ICECI)

The ICECI was created in the 1990s by the WHO, with the purpose of enabling classification of external causes of injuries. It is designed to help researchers and prevention practitioners to describe, measure and monitor the occurrence of injuries and to investigate their circumstances using an internally agreed classification.

The ICECI is based on a core module containing seven elements: mechanism of injury, objects/substances producing injury, place of occurrence, activity when injured, the role of human intent, use of alcohol and use of (other) psycho-active drugs (WHO, 2003).

International Classification of Diseases- 10th revision (ICD-10)

The ICD-10 came into use in WHO Member States as from 1994. It is the international standard diagnostic classification for all general epidemiological and many health management purposes and clinical use. These include the analysis of the general health situation of population groups and monitoring of the incidence and prevalence of diseases and other health problems in relation to other variables such as the characteristics and circumstances of the individuals affected, reimbursement, resource allocation, quality and guidelines. It is used to classify diseases and other health problems recorded in many types of health and vital records including death certificates and health records (WHO, 1995).

Relationship between ICECI and ICD

The ICECI is designed to complement the ICD-10 external causes' classification. The ICD-10, including its external causes' classification, is the reference classification for international reporting of mortality. The ICD-10, often in a clinical modification is widely used to classify hospital inpatient cases. As a specialised system focusing on external causes of injury, the ICECI enables more detailed and flexible classification in its subject area.

Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding Systems

Classification of imported and exported products is based on a common nomenclature developed by the World Customs Organization, known as the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding Systems. It comprises about 5 000 commodity groups, each identified by a six digit code (WCO, 2009). The system is used by more than 200 economies as a basis for applying tariffs and for the collection of international trade statistics. It is also used by customs officials to help identify products which may require safety screening.

Other international classification systems

Some countries are using the *United Nations Standard Products and Services Code* (UNSPSC) and product bar code systems to code products subject to product safety actions. The UNSPSC is the result of a merger of the United Nations' Common Coding System (UNCCS) and Dun & Bradstreet's Standard Product and Services Codes (SPSC). It provides a hierarchical set of product categories that can be used to classify products and services.

Product bar codes are standardised symbols put on products so that merchants can, for example, easily identify and track individual items (by scanning the codes). They are in use widely internationally.

Other factors affecting data comparability

Cultural differences

Cultural differences among countries can affect the ease with which information on safety issues can be understood and compared. The interpretation of specific terminology and concepts can differ, as can basic approaches to safety issues and risk assessment. Flame retardants are a case in point. In Europe the approaches to flame retardants differ among countries; the chemical and environmental risks of flame retardants are given more weight in some European countries while the fire hazards are given greater weight in others.

Regulation

Different legal and regulatory systems also raise hurdles in the comparison of product safety data. In some countries, for example, products are subject to mandatory detailed standards. Under the European "New Approach", however, only essential safety requirements are spelled out in mandatory legislation. Compliance with standards is voluntary but, if the standard is endorsed at the EU level (referenced in the *Official Journal of the EU*), it has the advantage of presumed compliance with the essential requirements.

Also responsibility for product safety is generally shared among several agencies within countries. The manner, in which they are shared, however, differs significantly from country-to-country. Cosmetics, for example, are covered by the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA) in the Netherlands; while in the United States, they are covered by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The VWA also covers many other consumer products like toys; in the United States, these are regulated by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

Standards

Product safety technical standards play an important role in determining whether a product is safe. However, great differences can be seen in the status of these standards, as mentioned previously, and their technical content among countries. This leads to difficulties when comparing data.

Harmonisation or convergence of standards, though difficult, therefore has great appeal and is being pursued in some areas. For example, despite technical difficulties, the International Committee of the Toy Industry (ICTI) (see www.toy-icti.org) launched an initiative to review differences in toy standards worldwide. The goal is to initiate an industry-led harmonisation process.

III. Current information-sharing

There is a wide variety of consumer product safety information-sharing mechanisms that function between different authorities at the domestic level, as well as those that are in place internationally. The increase in internationally-traded consumer products has led to the intensification of international co-operation on consumer product safety issues in recent years. This has resulted in numerous bilateral agreements on product safety information-sharing across borders and also in a rise in multilateral initiatives that are described in more detail in this chapter.

Information exchanges on consumer product safety cover a wide range of activities, including sharing information on market surveillance practices, product safety test results, accidents and injuries, identification of unsafe products and emergencies and also various product standardisation activities.

Information shared within countries

Countries first collect data at the national level. As indicated in Part I, administrations collect product safety information from numerous sources. These sources can include complaints and incident data from consumers or consumer associations, information from businesses, NGOs, results of market surveillance and customs controls, reports in the media, fire investigators, doctors/hospitals, insurance companies, etc.

The first questions that arise are whether this data can be centralised and used in the risk assessment of consumer products on the market and if so, how this can be accomplished. It is generally accepted that sharing information among public authorities within a country contributes to addressing product safety questions more effectively. To what extent and in what ways information-sharing between authorities is possible depends on the specific legal and institutional relationships existing in a country.

Based on the responses to the OECD questionnaire, it appears that information sharing between domestic administrations in most cases is well developed in individual countries. Information sharing between authorities is carried out through established committees or on an *ad hoc* basis. In the case of Australia and New Zealand, information exchanges are facilitated through an extranet, which is a web mechanism that permits the sharing of test reports and other documentation and provides a forum for discussion of current issues. Often there are centrally-established national injury databases, which serve to collect and share information, including accidents and injuries attributed to product risks. The majority of the countries responding to the questionnaire have established (or are in the process of establishing) systems, whereby authorities responsible for product safety co-operate with border control authorities to address unsafe products. The objective of this information-sharing is to prevent these goods from reaching national markets. However, the degree of this co-operation varies from one country to another.

Information shared across borders

More than ever, consumer products span the globe on their way from factories to consumers. Often the same products are marketed in many countries. Therefore co-operation in the area of product safety and information exchange has become a shared priority for policy makers. This co-operation currently takes place via bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

Bilateral information sharing mechanisms

Bilateral arrangements are increasingly common in the product safety area. These include different degrees of co-operation depending on the participating countries in question. Bilateral co-operation exists, for example, between Australia and New Zealand as well as Korea and Japan. Moreover, the United States, Canada and the European Commission have entered into memoranda of understanding and/or operating

agreements with different bilateral partners, allowing limited information sharing of a general nature. China also has memoranda of understanding in place with some foreign agencies.

Multilateral information sharing mechanisms

While bilateral agreements provide benefits for the countries involved and can help improve the safety of products, multilateral agreements can also contribute to ensuring better product safety.

Regional initiatives

There are different regional initiatives that address product safety information-sharing. These include activities at the European Union level and initiatives among other groups of countries.

At the EU level, Member States share information on corrective actions with respect to dangerous products, thus enabling other network members to rapidly take action on products found to be unsafe. As indicated earlier, the European Commission operates an information exchange system called RAPEX, which facilitates an information exchange on restrictive and corrective measures taken on products posing serious or moderate risks to consumers. In addition, since 2009, the European Commission has operated an on line system which makes it possible for businesses to alert (in accordance with their legal obligations) all relevant Member States about dangerous consumer products.

EU Member States also collaborate to share their practical experiences in such areas as market surveillance and co-operation with customs authorities. For example, the Product Safety Forum of Europe (PROSAFE) gathers European market surveillance officers together, in order to exchange information informally (*e.g.* on product recalls). This is being done through informal meetings where technical day-to-day problems are discussed. PROSAFE also supports exchanges of officials and executes joint market surveillance actions where the European countries participate. The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member countries who participate in the European Economic Area (EEA) (*i.e.* Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway) also participate in the above described information sharing activities described above.

In addition, the European Commission hosts a European injury database (IDB). This system collects accident and injury data from 21 EU and EEA countries and provides central access to collected information. It does not, however, currently establish any direct link between an accident or injury related to a product and the cause of the accident or injury.

Another European initiative is undertaken via the Information and Communication System for Market Surveillance (ICSMS), which is a mechanism designed to facilitate co-operation among market surveillance bodies. ICSMS is an Internet-based tool that enables a comprehensive exchange of product information between EU and EEA member market surveillance bodies. The system offers information about tested products, test results, and official measures taken in member countries.

Specific groups of EU Member States also exchange information in an enhanced manner. These include the Baltic Co-operation Contract, which is an agreement between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia to intensify collaboration between Baltic consumer protection institutions and strengthen co-operation on market surveillance. There are also other information-sharing initiatives in place between the Slovak Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia. In addition, the Northern European authorities ("Nordic authorities") co-operate closely on product safety.

There is also informal trilateral co-operation in place between China, the US and the European Union. The parties exchange general non-sensitive information on regulatory developments in the consumer product safety area.

The *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)* is an inter-governmental forum of countries from the Asia-Pacific area operating on the basis of non-binding commitments. This co-operation includes product safety related initiatives, such as the APEC Toy Safety Initiative. This programme aims at organising meetings to enhance toy safety standards and practices used in the Asia-Pacific region by increasing transparency, encouraging better alignment and reducing unnecessary impediments to trade.

The *Organization of American States (OAS)* is a regional organisation, whose objective is to enhance political dialog and economic efficiency in the hemisphere. Consumer product safety issues are given high priority. The OAS forum provides market surveillance authorities of North and South Americas and the Caribbean with a venue for sharing information and co-ordinating domestic product safety initiatives.

Global initiatives

Effective global governance on product safety has become a common priority for policy makers and enforcement agencies to help enhance their abilities to tackle unsafe products. National product safety authorities are involved in different networks to share information on product safety related matters.

In addition to the OECD's work on consumer product safety, broad international co-operation exists within the following frameworks:

- The *International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO)* is a multi-stakeholder forum which addresses health and safety issues related to globally marketed consumer products. ICPHSO's efforts are aimed at *i)* reducing consumer injuries and deaths and *ii)* providing professionals with the latest information on how to comply with product safety regulations and how to conduct product recalls. ICPHSO shares information through symposiums, training sessions, newsletters and its website. Consumer organisations and consumer advocates, government agencies, businesses, legal firms and academia participate in the organisation.
- The *International Consumer Product Safety Caucus (ICPSC)* is a regulators' forum created in 2006 as a spin-off of ICPHSO. ICPSC is aimed at facilitating information exchange in relation to government policy, legislation and market surveillance. It is intended to strengthen international co-operation between governments and regulatory agencies. The shared information concerns general topics, such as risk assessment, priority setting, intervention schemes and organisation of market surveillance authorities. Information on specific issues such as individual products is also shared, without however systematically including any details such as test results or recall notices. The exchange of data takes place mainly through meetings and correspondence; certain material is made available through the publicly-accessible website. The meetings of ICPSC are open to governmental organisations from all over the world. Recently the ICPSC has facilitated information sharing and discussion forums through conferences on tracking labels and recall effectiveness.
- The *International Standards Organisation Committee on Consumer Policy (ISO-COPOLCO)* is a technical committee that reports to the ISO Council. It provides a forum for the exchange of information on the experience of consumer participation in the development and implementation of standards in the consumer field, and on other questions of interest to consumers in national and international standardisation. COPOLCO also proposes new areas for standardisation where there is a perceived need for enhanced consumer protection. Currently, it is developing an International Standard on product recalls (ISO/TC 240) which will help harmonise vocabulary and basic concepts efforts, thereby helping to strengthen information sharing. Its working group on product safety examines how adequately the issue

of safety is being addressed within the ISO's current system of standardisation. The ISO COPOLCO currently has 62 participating country members and 43 observer country members.

- The *UNECE - Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardisation Policies (WP 6)* is a forum for dialogue among regulators and policy makers. The participants discuss issues related to technical regulations, standardisation, conformity assessment, metrology and market surveillance. The group's work includes topics related to product safety.
- The World Trade Organisation has developed an Information Management System which provides a mechanism for countries to share information and comment on regulations and standards that Member governments have notified to the WTO under the terms of the Agreement on Technical Barriers of Trade (WTO, 2009).

Obstacles to information-sharing among market surveillance authorities

Although, in recent years, co-operation between market surveillance authorities has been strengthened worldwide, there are still obstacles preventing efficient information exchange. These obstacles are described below.

Privacy and confidentiality - protection of professional secrecy and personal data

One of the main obstacles in sharing product safety information among market surveillance and enforcement authorities is the need to protect professional secrecy and personal data. Information can be sensitive because of pending investigations, pending court actions, liability issues or otherwise because of the protection of business secrets and personal data. The protection of data is generally covered by specific legislation.

Greater transparency with regard to the confidentiality regimes *vis-à-vis* both the public and other authorities within the country or in third countries would be helpful, and is needed before any extensive data-sharing systems can be envisaged. It would be also helpful to clarify whether information that can be exchanged between authorities, can also be used in enforcement action in another jurisdiction.

Data exchange systems

Different storing and sharing data systems, *e.g.* AUZSHARE, RAPEX, RAPEX-China, CPSC-AQSIQ Manufacturer Notification Procedure and ICSMS, complicate the exchange of data at a multilateral level. Whilst data can be extracted from different systems and shared (manually) outside the IT network, interoperability of the data processing systems could constitute a major challenge to improved information sharing.

Diverging laws

As indicated above, differing legislation on consumer product safety means that not all data that can be exchanged is directly relevant for enforcement actions. When an authority receives information on a product identified as dangerous in another country where differing legislation is in place, it needs to check whether the product is also dangerous under the country's own legislation. Moreover, issues can arise with respect to the interpretation of similar laws in different jurisdictions.

Time and resources required

Some respondents to the OECD questionnaire mentioned that there is currently too much information to process and there is an oversupply of unnecessary information. This can be problematic as the time and resources available to product safety agencies are limited. At the same time, developing and maintaining co-operative efforts with other jurisdictions, while potentially highly beneficial, may also be limited due to resource constraints.

Verification

Although sensitive information on an emerging risk requires rapid action, there could be a time interval between discovery of the dangerous product on the market, risk assessment, adoption of restrictive measures and their notification through relevant alert systems. The main source of the problem is the time required to properly test a product, which may amount to weeks or even months.

In the case of the European Union efforts have been made to accelerate notifications on dangerous products. Countries are required to report on these products immediately after the adoption of restrictive measures, whether or not an appeal has been launched. Furthermore, in urgent cases, countries may share information even before any measures are adopted.

Language barriers

Products safety information is often only available in the official language of the country in question. This can limit the extent to which it can be effectively shared with others.

IV. Strengthening international information-sharing

As summarised in Box 3 and more fully discussed below, information sharing could be strengthened in eight different ways.

Box 3. Ways to strengthen consumer product information sharing

- **Improving data comparability.** Increased comparability would enable countries to utilise and understand data collected by others more effectively.
- **Addressing data security and confidentiality issues.** Ensuring data security and confidentiality is key in light of commercial sensitivities. Different approaches among jurisdictions need to be understood.
- **Managing information flows.** To be useful, information needs to be clear and concise; the volume of information flows needs to be manageable.
- **Harmonising standards.** With common standards, safety concerns could be more easily flagged at any point in the supply chain.
- **Increasing dialogue within countries.** Addressing information gaps and exchange problems at national level are key to making cross-border schemes work effectively.
- **Strengthening cross-border co-operation.** Development of improved methods and mechanisms for increasing collaboration needs to be explored.
- **Co-ordinating enforcement efforts.** Greater international co-operation to improve product traceability is needed; legal barriers to cross-border co-operation need to be addressed.
- **Expanding country information-sharing schemes.** Most groups are relatively small; efforts should be made to include all major importing and exporting countries.

Improving the comparability of information across countries, organisations and stakeholders

Improving the comparability of data would assist with information sharing by enabling countries to utilise and understand data which is collected and distributed by other countries more effectively.

Comparability of data can include consistency in the type of information and detail collected (for instance the number/type of fields needed to describe a product such as name, brand, model, etc.), the language in which the information is available and the systems used to classify the information (*e.g.* product categories). Improving the data comparability can also assist in helping to ensure that restrictions in sharing that data are properly applied.

The use of common classification or coding systems for key information could greatly enhance the comparability of data. Coding systems would also address language issues in sharing information since the descriptions of the codes can be easily translated into any and all languages used by the participating countries. Existing international classification systems might be reviewed and considered to see how they could be used to enhance information-sharing both domestically and internationally.

With respect to injuries, as mentioned earlier, there currently exists an international classification system (ICD-10) that is used by many jurisdictions. Analysis of injury data is used for both the

identification of emerging issues and priority-setting for risk mitigation actions such as increased market surveillance and enforcement, information/education activities and standards or regulatory development/update. The use of this common classification system can help with merging data to assist in identifying trends in injuries – useful for the early detection of consumer product safety issues, particularly for jurisdictions with smaller populations.

With respect to product classification, the WCO's Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding Systems provides a good basis for product classification, but it lacks the level of detail required by most consumer product safety regulatory/market surveillance authorities and stakeholders. The identification of the type of product may be the single most critical data element in comparability of data. Determining whether a product is a toy, a lighter, a consumer chemical or a household appliance provides the first step in linking all types of consumer product safety information: from injury data to market surveillance plans to regulatory requirements to recalls. Many jurisdictions already apply compatible broad product classification systems (*e.g.* household appliance) with some having very well-developed coding systems with the ability to drill-down further into the product type (*e.g.* household appliance, toaster).

The current product classification system used by customs agencies worldwide could be used as the foundation for building a more detailed consumer product classification system for product safety purposes. Doing so would allow continued/enhanced sharing of data and collaboration between consumer product safety and customs agencies. Consideration could, however, also be given to the United Nations Standard Products and Services Code and the standardised product bar codes that are described above.

For test results, market surveillance actions and recalls on specific products, there remains an issue with determining whether the product in question is available in a given jurisdiction and if it is, whether it is in fact the same product. Where possible, jurisdictions can look to obtain distribution lists for products, not just in their own jurisdiction but globally and share that information with other countries, as appropriate to increase the usefulness of the data. Also, a more detailed description of the product can be provided including a photo,² which would give market surveillance authorities more information to find the product.

Ultimately, the comparability of product safety information would be improved by the use of a global database(s) of all marketed products and their manufacturers. The increased use of and requirement for consumer product tracking systems, that identify a product, its production information, including manufacturer and location may result in the creation and evolution of databases for common, worldwide use.

Addressing data security and confidentiality issues

Information exchange between countries is an important instrument in addressing the often global nature of product safety risks. The effectiveness of information exchange depends on the effectiveness of the institutions and frameworks that support the exchange. Any information shared should be done so on a secure basis and in a timely fashion. The security of information is essential as a large amount of this information is commercially sensitive or may be subject to legal processes. However, for information to be used effectively agencies must have access to it within an acceptable timeframe in order to be able to act on it and address product safety problems before they become detrimental to consumers.

Whilst the receipt of information in a timely manner is important to consumer product safety agencies, the security of information provided and issues associated with confidentiality impact on the

² The inclusion of a photograph would improve identification of products across borders, while helping to address issues related to language barriers.

sharing of information in a suitable time frame. This suggests that there is a trade-off between the provision of timely information and the ability for regulators to share and use confidential information in a secure way.

The ability of regulators to act on confidential information may be limited directly through explicit legislative restrictions, or may be limited indirectly, such as where Freedom of Information laws mean a regulator cannot guarantee the confidentiality of certain information received from foreign regulators. Important to this consideration is an understanding of differences in confidentiality requirements and knowledge of how the information received will be used (*i.e.* by the regulator or shared with the public).

The design and formation of a universal classification system may be useful in identifying different levels of confidentiality and may be a helpful way to disaggregate information into differing categories, allowing some information to be more widely shared. However, such a mechanism would be legally complex, when applied multi-laterally.

One method currently being used to overcome issues associated with the confidential nature of some shared information is the development of bilateral and multi-lateral agreements. Memorandums of understanding, for example, can directly address administrative considerations; however they can be legally complex and they could become even more complex if more parties become involved.

Managing information flows

If a particular item is regarded as having safety concerns in one jurisdiction, it is important to the safety and well being of citizens in other jurisdictions that this view is conveyed to other markets where that product may be sold. The reason for any action taken in relation to products that are regarded as unsafe may be important in allowing other countries to decide whether to place restrictions on the product.

To be effective this involves the provision of reliable data about the origin and identity of products that is readily comparable across countries so they can be easily traced between markets and, if necessary, withdrawn from the supply chain. However, an increased level of information sharing is only effective if countries can utilise the information and data provided.

For this reason it is fundamental that data shared between jurisdictions be provided in a form which can be readily understood and is comparable. For information to be useful it must be able to be interpreted efficiently and effectively and be assimilated with existing data held by an agency. Clear, concise information on products is vital for product identification purposes, ensuring that jurisdictions to which information is provided can understand the relevant issues and identify the product in question. This also allows for the overcoming of cultural differences which may impact on the ability to use information, such as language barriers.

In highlighting the value of an increased level of information sharing, it is important to note that the level and volume of information shared needs to be controlled to ensure that it is kept at a manageable level. An overwhelming level of information sharing may hamper the usefulness of such actions. If such an effect occurs, this reduction in the utility of shared information may have negative effects on sharing information.

Harmonising standards

The rise of e-commerce, as well as reduced transportation costs and the lowering of trade barriers, has significantly increased the prevalence of consumers acquiring products directly from overseas-based suppliers. While providing significant benefits to consumers in terms of price and product choice, this also increases the risk of products falling between differing product safety standards across jurisdictions.

To the extent that it is feasible, harmonised safety standards would provide a consistent basis from which to assess whether action should be taken in relation to particular products, as well as facilitating the consistent enforcement of general safety provisions in countries where these exist, bearing in mind unique domestic considerations.

The complete harmonisation of product safety standards may not be possible, as domestic policy considerations about the level of risk posed by different products vary. However, the broad objectives of product safety regulations are consistent across jurisdictions and as such there would certainly be some scope for harmonisation. For example, products which pose direct physical risks to consumers would generally be subject to action by the majority, if not all of enforcement agencies globally. As such, harmonised safety standards would facilitate action in relation to these products.

Currently, detection of safety problems that result from different standards being applied in exporting and importing countries is complicated for goods in transit. With harmonised standards and regulations, safety concerns would be more readily identified at any point along the supply chain as they would always be subject to the same rules and regulations.

It is important to recognise that harmonisation would require a large amount of time and resources and, as such, may not be feasible on a large scale in the short or medium term. It may nonetheless be important to keep in mind as a longer-term objective as existing standards are reviewed and new standards are developed.

Increasing dialogue within countries

Mechanisms for exchanging information can be further improved by increased dialogue not only between countries internationally, but also by improving dialogue within countries. For the exchange of information to be successful at an international level, a national approach to information sharing is fundamental. Domestic institutions must work collectively and collaboratively to ensure that domestic information sharing is effective before global information sharing can achieve its maximum benefit.

Gaps in information-sharing domestically will adversely affect international attempts to share information. For example, a lack of communication between product safety regulators and customs/border protection agencies could lead to the loss of information that could be useful for other countries.

Domestic institutions need to build on domestic information sharing and extend this process internationally. Networks within specific countries should be utilised to develop data and information which can then be provided to others at an international level. To facilitate increased dialogue domestically, forums between domestic agencies may be useful in increasing information flows. These could be organised on a regular basis (*e.g.* quarterly or semi-annually) to discuss the current product safety environment and co-ordinate actions and information gathering. Web-based networks such as search engines and intranets could also be developed domestically to enhance communication between agencies and improve information flows to consumers.

Strengthening formal and informal arrangements for greater cross-border co-operation

Whilst it is widely recognised that an increased level of information sharing will provide benefits to all participating countries, the methods and mechanisms for this increased level of collaboration need to be formulated. There are a variety of ways this could be achieved, ranging from simple methods such as international forums through to more complex mechanisms such as the establishment of some form of Internet-based information-sharing system. Authorities should also bear in mind that as the volume and geographical spread of international trade grow, the issue of documenting traceability may become of major importance. Consideration should be given to methods of co-operation in this field.

Establishing and using international forums to discuss product safety concerns, enforcement actions and differing rules and regulations may be effective in increasing dialogue between countries. These could be initially organised regionally on a regular basis. These regional forums could then feed into a global forum which may meet less frequently. However, the cost of maintaining and participating in such forums needs to be considered as does the expected level of participation (attendance can be sporadic). Moreover, the sharing of information in this way may not address the need for timely information.

An electronic method for international regulators to share information about emerging hazards or enforcement actions they are undertaking may be a good way to proactively address product safety concerns. Information shared in this way could be done in a manner which would be far more timely than face-to-face meetings. However, as mentioned earlier in the report, concerns may arise if this led to an oversupply of information. Clear protocols for the use of this mechanism could help to address this concern.

Such a mechanism might involve the establishment of a website, with a web-based search function allowing international agencies (and possibly other stakeholders) to search for recall information. Alternatively, the development of a password protected web portal between international agencies, in particular where information could be stored and accessed by other agencies, could facilitate greater cross-border communication.

Co-ordinating enforcement efforts

International co-operation could improve the traceability of products which are exported and imported and could be used to allow the country of origin to take appropriate action to address product safety concerns at their source. A key consideration in any co-ordinated enforcement is domestic administrative law requirements, in particular, rules governing the use and sharing of confidential information (see above discussion on confidentiality).

The establishment of forums for international agencies, as outlined above, may also be useful in co-ordinating enforcement efforts, as would the development of the above-mentioned web-based information sharing tool.

Expanding country information-sharing schemes

Most groups which have been formed to address product safety issues and enhance information sharing are relatively small. Expanding the scope to include a larger number of countries would help to develop more comprehensive and complete databases, while providing a more effective platform for addressing common problems on a more global basis. Efforts should be made to include all major importers and exporters in these schemes. Expansion could also help to exploit economies of scale more effectively.

In addition to expanding existing arrangements, countries should continue to explore new agreements to expand information sharing with specific countries in certain regions or geographical areas. The availability of limited resources for authorities needs to be considered when exploring this.

V. Conclusions

As indicated in the preceding section, stakeholders can move on many fronts to strengthen information sharing. Following are suggestions on how they could advance in these areas in the short, medium and long terms, taking into account the resource and legal constraints facing the various product safety jurisdictions that might benefit from improved international information flows. The proposals are based on a presumption that for most jurisdictions, the most sensitive case-specific information will continue to be shared with foreign officials under the terms of formal bilateral or multilateral agreements.

Actions that can be taken in the short term

Consumer product safety authorities at various levels of government and related institutions publish an abundance of information for general public consumption on a regular basis. Much of this information relates to product recalls and safety alerts and is accessible *via* the Internet. Such information is normally published primarily for domestic consumption. It should be possible to pool such information (*e.g.* about product recalls) into a single web-based platform that would employ a specialised search program to query the recall web sites of specified jurisdictions. The pooled information at the single web site could take the form of links, summaries, and full content. Such a pool would be particularly useful if the authorities ensured the same minimum common product information was available at each source; a solution would, however, need to be found for language differences in the longer term. With minimal co-operation from participating jurisdictions, consumers and consumer product safety authorities anywhere in the world would gain access to the recall information pool, availing themselves of safety information that might not otherwise be as easily available. Such an effort would require a relatively small amount of start up and sustained funding. Operation would probably be best by a recognised and appropriate international entity.

Also in the short to medium term, the same web-based platform might be used to pool and give high profile publicity to emergency alerts or other news (beyond specific recalls) that consumer product safety authorities believe should be shared with product safety authorities and the public in other countries.

It is also suggested that in the short term, product safety authorities develop a mechanism to co-ordinate international product safety initiatives. There are various initiatives in the consumer product safety area internationally that all aim at reinforcing co-operation among different countries and harmonising activities among them. These initiatives often cover similar issues and the risk of duplication is high. Product safety authorities would benefit from a mechanism to help manage these efforts more efficiently. Publishing information about various international initiatives on a single web-based platform would be a useful activity within such a co-ordination effort.

As a final short-term measure, product safety authorities could continue efforts to organise themselves at an international level, in both regional and global *fora*. Such meetings could help officials to better understand differences in terminology and practice, including risk assessment. They could also be beneficial in promoting regulatory harmonisation and helping to identify emerging policy issues that could best be addressed jointly.

Actions that could be developed over a medium term

Jurisdictions undertake or commission studies of known or potential product hazards and often make those studies available to the public. Such studies would be of value to product safety authorities in other jurisdictions if they knew of their existence. Unfortunately, there are practical limitations to any product safety official's ability to peruse, on a regular basis, the web sites of multiple product safety jurisdictions. Publishing such information (or summaries with links) simultaneously, in both native and an agreed

common language, on a centralised web site would facilitate quick and easy access to product safety reports from around the world.

As an initiative to follow up the short term recommendation for a website pooling recall information and urgent notices, the same platform might be expanded in the medium term to carry additional information about regulatory activities for public consumption. This might include updates on relevant new legislation or rules, standardisation activities, legislative studies, and market surveillance reports from different countries and agencies. The possibilities and advantages for further developing the website should be analysed with the objective of making it a user friendly system, well organised, with efficient search functions. The possibility of making the information uniformly available in an agreed common language should be considered.

Expanding on the short term mechanism for product safety officials to co-ordinate international initiatives, it may be useful to establish, on a password access basis, a web-based directory of experts among international consumer product safety officials. Such a listing would enable experts from different countries to contact each other if they have questions related to each other's specific area of expertise.

Longer-term actions

Some jurisdictions maintain data bases with information about incidents and injuries arising from the use of consumer products. This information is often publicly available. There is not, however, a universally agreed methodology or format for the data to be collected, which limits the potential for assembling such information from multiple jurisdictions. Product safety authorities could work to develop an approach on injury data collection, through which a useful global pool of information on product hazards could be created and made accessible to researchers, policy makers, product safety authorities, and consumers around the world. Such a data pool would be especially useful in identifying and tracking emerging hazards which may be experienced in some jurisdictions, even before a product has been introduced in other jurisdictions. The use of an agreed common language could be considered to promote uniformity of data. It would not include pooling of injury data that contains protected personal information or other information commonly protected from disclosure by product safety authorities.

There may be research work undertaken in some jurisdictions where early data or preliminary conclusions could be misleading to the public or unjustifiably damaging to business interests if released prematurely. While such preliminary information may not be released to the public, it may be useful to make it available to other product safety authorities on a relatively broad basis. This would be helpful in instances where a study in one jurisdiction would benefit from input from other jurisdictions in order to validate data or factors in the study. For information sharing of this nature, it would be necessary to create a confidentiality protocol for participants and a secure, electronic means of exchanging information. A long-term goal such as this would likely be feasible only after a period of confidence building and success with the short- and medium-term initiatives mentioned above. As above, this recommendation would not include sharing sensitive case-specific information developed during the course of investigations or other information commonly protected from disclosure by product safety authorities.

Finally, co-operation at an international level to improve the traceability of products would contribute to better information sharing among authorities. It is proposed that product safety authorities identify areas for international co-ordination in product traceability and work toward implementation. The work of the International Consumer Product Safety Caucus is key in this regard.

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ANNEX I

EXAMPLES OF DOMESTIC INFORMATION-SHARING MECHANISMS

Following are summaries of information-sharing mechanisms in a number of OECD and non-OECD economies. The summaries are based primarily on material contained in responses to the OECD survey.

Australia

Information about emerging hazards, bans and standards is shared between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministries responsible for regulatory development and enforcement, as well as New Zealand consumer product safety agency. It is mainly exchanged using web-based tools, such as AUZSHARE and the Product Safety Regulator's Extranet, and through regular teleconferences and face-to-face meetings.

The ACCC established an Emerging Hazards Clearinghouse at the beginning of 2010 to help ensure that emerging hazard risks are systematically identified, quickly prioritised and categorised and appropriately addressed. The Clearinghouse offers an improved capacity for regulators to share emerging hazard information, thereby helping to improve the consistency and efficiency of regulatory responses.

Canada

Health Canada is a federal department responsible for the co-ordination of consumer product safety initiatives at the national level. It shares data on recalls and incidents with provincial authorities on an *ad hoc* basis. Its Consumer Product Safety Bureau collects consumer complaints and incident data from a variety of sources, including consumer, business and media reports. In addition, the Public Health Agency of Canada co-ordinates the Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (CHIRPP). This is a computerized information system that collects and analyses data on injuries to people (mainly children) from a number of hospitals.

Chile

Information-sharing mechanisms comprise informal working groups formed by different public and private entities. They focus on non-food and food-related product safety issues. In addition, formal networks focusing on food, drugs, drugs surveillance and the use of dangerous chemicals, have been established. These include the Toxicology Alert and Information Network (RITACHILE), the National Centre for Drugs Information and Surveillance (CENIMEF) and the Chilean Agency for Food Innocuousness.

RITACHILE harmonizes registries from toxicology consultations (*e.g.*, laboratories, clinics, antidotes banks and investigation centres) on a web-based system that automatically identifies responsible persons in case of a chemical alert or accident.

In Chile, different actors are responsible for non-food product safety. In general, National Consumer Service is the entitled authority; however particular responsibilities rely on specific regulators (for instance, the Electricity and Fuels Superintendence is in charge of the electric supplies). Each authority has its own resources and background. Upon that, SERNAC is currently beginning and leading a project of co-ordination and systematisation of the existing information under international criteria, in order to ensure a formal and fluid information exchange between the different actors involved, as well as to simplify management and common initiatives. The non-governmental organisations are also involved in the information-sharing mechanisms (*e.g.* the Toxicology Alert and Information Network (RITACHILE) or the Centre of toxicological investigation CITUC.)

Concerning the non-food products, Chile there are successful experiences under non-governmental organisation such as: CENIMEF's main objective is to provide information about drugs to health professionals and to the public. It also monitors and evaluates adverse reactions related to the use of drugs. The health centres that form this network have access to scientific and regulatory information, as well as to technical support.

China

The General Administration of Quality Supervision Inspection and Quarantine of China (AQSIQ) plays an important role in gathering product safety information on domestic and internationally traded products. Other government agencies deal with specific product safety issues according to their functions and responsibilities, for example, the Ministry of Health is responsible for gathering data on consumer injuries and the Administration for Standardisation takes care of the development and implementation of domestic standards. Sources of information include inspections, consumer complaints and notifications from abroad.

Efforts are being made to strengthen domestic and cross-border information-sharing mechanisms, in order to facilitate the rapid exchange of information on products posing serious risks to the health and safety of consumers.

Czech Republic

The Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Health take leading roles in co-ordinating consumer product safety work. Within the ministries, there are dedicated working groups focusing on specific topics, such as toys or the implementation of the EC General Product Safety Directive. The information is shared not only between the ministries but with businesses and consumer organisations and customs authorities. The information exchange is facilitated through announcements in journals (*e.g.* D-Test, SOS Magazine), and on the websites of governmental and non-governmental bodies. Moreover, joint seminars and educational workshops are held and joint control activities are carried out.

Denmark

In Denmark, information is exchanged among senior government officials and with other countries through the EU RAPEX system. Also, some authorities share information with their counterparts informally when the responsibility for a product is shared by several authorities. Information about unsafe toys, for example, is provided to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for chemicals and the Danish Safety Technology Authority (SIK) for non-chemicals. Improvement in the approach to national product safety issues is being pursued through a new Market Surveillance Council, in which the SIK plays an important role.

European Union

Among the 27 EU Member States, the three EFTA/EEA countries and the European Commission, product safety information is exchanged on consumer products through a system called RAPEX. The system does not extend to food, pharmaceuticals and medical devices as these are covered by other mechanisms. The RAPEX system provides for the (mandatory) rapid exchange of information on measures taken in Member States to prevent or restrict the marketing or use of products posing a serious risk to the health and safety of consumers. It can be used to circulate also other information on products presenting moderate risk to consumers (and since 2010 it also contains notifications of products other than consumer products as well as certain other risks). The European Commission makes publicly available on its website a weekly overview of the dangerous products reported by the national authorities.

Estonia

The Market Surveillance Council was established under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications in 2004, to co-ordinate the work of market surveillance authorities dealing with product safety issues. The objective of the Council is to promote co-operation among the different authorities which are responsible for ensuring the safety of products. The Council is chaired by the Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry; its members include all market supervisory authorities, including the Consumer Protection Board (CPB) (which hosts a publicly available website containing information on dangerous products). Council meetings take place twice a year. In addition to the CPB, the Technical Surveillance Authority, the Health Board, the Estonian Tax and Customs Board are involved in information exchanges.

France

In France, information is exchanged among public authorities in formal and informal manners. The Group on Exchanges of Material and Information on Accidents (CEDIAC) gathers stakeholders together several times per year, to discuss the principal measures that have been adopted and ongoing plans related to injury prevention. In addition, protocols facilitating exchanges of information were set up among various national authorities, including the General Directorate of Competition, Consumption and the Suppression of Fraud (DGCCRF), the General Directorate of Customhouses and Indirect Rights (DGDDI) and the French Agency of Health Security of the Products of Health (AFSSAPS).

Information on product safety is made available to the public on a single web platform (<http://www.stopauxaccidentsquotidiens.fr>) which pools information from a number of national bodies, including the DGCCRF, the Commission for the Security of Consumers (CSC), the General Directorate of Health (DGS) and the National Institute of Consumption (INC). In addition, the health agencies, such as the National Institute of Prevention and Education for Health (INPES) and the Institute of Health Wakefulness (INVS), provide information on everyday life accidents.

Israel

The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour, with its affiliated bodies (such as the Standards Institution of Israel and the Consumer Protection Administration), is in charge of market surveillance and product conformity to mandatory standards of non-food consumer products. They are currently developing methods to facilitate systematic data collection and harmonise parts of its legislation and standards with those of the European Commission under the Agreement on Conformity Assessment Acceptance of Industrial Products. Under the new regime, it is anticipated that there should be relatively few obstacles to information exchange, either domestically or internationally. The main challenge will likely be the need to preserve confidentiality where required by law or matters of commercial interests.

Apart from the governmental bodies, Israeli non-governmental organisations are involved in the data collection process. They provide injury information on children entering selected hospitals through the BETEREM- Safe Kids of Israel programme.

Korea

The Korean Consumer Agency (KCA) and the Korean Agency for Technology and Standards (KATS) are mainly responsible for consumer product safety issues. The KCA provides information to consumers, issues safety alerts, proposes corrective measures to manufacturers, and suggests corrective measures and system improvements to the central and local governments. KATS focuses accident and recall information on electrical equipment and industrial products. The two authorities co-ordinate with other relevant bodies, such as hospitals, fire stations and the Korean Customs Service in exchanging information on injuries and unsafe products. In addition, there are provisions for sharing information with foreign governmental agencies.

Mexico

The Consumer Protection Federal Agency of Mexico (PROFECO) is about to launch a Rapid Alert System in order to issue recalls of products or food that may pose a risk to the life, health and safety of consumers. Information will be made available on an official website. The main objective of the system is to provide a mechanism for sharing information on hazardous products at national level so that corrective actions can be taken by the relevant authorities. The information is seen as being useful not only to Mexican authorities but also for the private sector and consumers. The system will facilitate information sharing with other rapid alert systems.

Slovenia

Working methods and co-operation arrangements are governed by regulations which establish information exchange procedures among national enforcement authorities and the exchange of information through the EU RAPEX system. An additional regulation defines the way of notifications to the competent authorities of dangerous consumer products and voluntary measures taken from producers and distributors. Some kinds of information on dangerous consumer products are published on government websites. In addition, the Slovenian General Product Safety Act established an Advisory Board which deals with information sharing on consumer product safety issues. Its 15 members include the representatives of the administrative authorities, interested consumer organisations and the chamber of commerce.

Sweden

In Sweden, a number of agencies administer their own data collection and information-sharing systems; these include, for example, the Swedish Poisons Information Centre and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. Co-ordination is generally carried out on an informal basis, with information being exchanged on an *ad hoc* basis. Overall co-ordination is overseen by the Swedish Board for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment (SWEDAC), which co-ordinates market surveillance activities and data gathering under the auspices of the Market Surveillance Council.

Chinese Taipei

At the domestic level, the Bureau of Standards, Metrology and Inspection (BSMI) under the Ministry of Economic Affairs has an electronic information-sharing mechanism through which it exchanges information with customs authorities on imported products which are subject to inspection. The BSMI also exchanges non-confidential information on specific unsafe consumer products with other institutions. In

addition, the Consumer Protection Commission frequently exchanges documents and holds meetings with other agencies on unsafe products.

Turkey

The Market Surveillance Coordination Board, chaired by the Under-Secretariat of Foreign Trade, plays a leading role in the co-ordination of market surveillance activities in Turkey. The Board's meetings bring together regional market surveillance authorities, the Customs Authority, consumer organisations and business representatives, to discuss the product safety issues. The Board can also take advisory decisions about market surveillance activities.

United States

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is the agency responsible for ensuring consumer safety in the US market. It does so, in part, by gathering data from a number of sources, including consumers, firms, customs authorities and foreign counterparts.

Whereas some kinds of information can be made available to the public, other information can only be shared under a binding nondisclosure agreement with government parties. This is due to US federal law which restricts the manner in which information may be released outside the agency and the type of information. In accordance with the legal requirements, investigatory information is restricted. Also, some information on market surveillance actions or on emerging product safety hazards may be restricted when the matter is being prepared for a Commission for a vote or if it would signal unannounced enforcement activity.

Memoranda of understanding facilitate the sharing of general, but not case-specific, information with foreign regulators. CPSC operates a comprehensive and well utilised public information website that provides information about product recalls, standards, and some test results; the agency also supports several social media sites.