

7.6 Role of the health sector in the sound management of chemicals

Contents

- [In focus](#)
- [Background](#)
- [PHM comment](#)
- [Notes of discussion at EB138](#)

In focus

“At the request of Member States, the Secretariat will provide information on the importance of sound management of chemicals for the protection of human health, and on the role of the health sector in chemicals management. The results of a Secretariat consultation to identify priorities for action by the health sector will also be presented. The Board is invited to note the report.”

Document [EB138/18](#) incorporates some of the material already reported on the WHO website: (i) reporting on the consultation [here](#) and (ii) listing the updated health sector priorities [here](#).

Background

A number of WHA resolutions dealing with various aspects of chemicals safety have been adopted ([here](#)).

The most recent discussion in the Assembly was in 2014 at WHA67 in relation to the finalisation of the Minamata Convention regarding mercury exposure.

- Documents: [A67/24](#) and resolution [EB134.R5](#),
- Debate: [Item 14.5 commenced](#) (11th meeting); [Item 14.5 finalised](#) (12th meeting);
- Resolution [A67.11](#)

Secretariat document [A67/24](#) dealt mainly with mercury but in paras 18-22 it canvassed the wider issues associated with chemicals safety.

18. Mercury is only one of a number of chemicals of major public health concern. Preventable exposure to lead, carcinogens, highly hazardous pesticides and other hazardous chemicals continues to occur. These exposures result in significant disease burden and demands on health systems. In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20–22 June 2012) “The future we want”, deep concern was expressed that many countries lack the capacity for sound management of chemicals, and called for

additional efforts to enhance work towards strengthening capacities, including through partnerships, technical assistance and improved governance structures. Governments reaffirmed their aim to achieve by 2020 sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle and of hazardous waste in ways that lead to minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment, as set out in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

19. Member States have numerous opportunities to reduce or eliminate exposures to hazardous chemicals, including implementation of the [Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management](#). In resolution [WHA59.15](#) on that matter, the Health Assembly urged Member States to take full account of the health aspects of chemical safety in national implementation of the Strategic Approach and to participate in national, regional and international efforts to that end, including the [International Conference on Chemicals Management](#). The strategy for strengthening the engagement of the health sector in the implementation of the strategic approach, adopted by the International Conference on Chemicals Management at its third session (Nairobi, 17–21 September 2012), sets out [various actions](#).

20. Member States are invited to participate in [WHO's Chemical Risk Assessment Network](#), which was established on 1 July 2013 in recognition of the need for enhanced global efforts to share expertise on assessing and managing the risks associated with exposure to hazardous chemicals. Its main objectives are to provide a forum for scientific and technical exchange, facilitate and contribute to capacity building, and assist in the identification of emerging risks to human health from chemicals.

21. In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development decided to phase-out lead paints. The [Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint](#) is an initiative jointly undertaken by UNEP and WHO following a resolution of the second International Conference on Chemicals Management. The WHO Secretariat endorses the encouragement of the third International Conference to all governments, civil society organizations and the private sector to contribute to achievement of [the goal of the Global Alliance](#).

22. In order to guide the work of the Secretariat and Member States towards the achievement of the 2020 goal for the sound management of chemicals, the Secretariat proposes to consult Member States on identifying a set of core priority actions for the health sector.

Para 18 (above) refers to the Outcomes Document from the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Subsequently the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been adopted including its 17 goals and 169 targets ([here](#)). There are several references to chemicals safety:

- *Para 34 of the Agenda: “We will reduce the negative impacts of urban activities and of chemicals which are hazardous for human health and the environment, including through the environmentally sound management and safe use of chemicals, the reduction and recycling of waste and more efficient use of water and energy”;*

- *Target 3.9: “By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination;*
- *Target 6.3: “By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally”;*
- *Target 12.4: “By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment”.*

In para 22 (above) of [A67/24](#) the Secretariat indicates that it intends to consult Member States on identifying a set of core priority actions for the health sector. This consultation is reported [here](#) and the updated health sector priorities are listed [here](#). In summary these are:

- Devising better and standardized methods to determine impacts of chemicals on health;
- Formulating strategies aimed at prevention of ill-health and disease caused throughout the life course by chemicals;
- Building capabilities of countries to deal with poisonings and chemical incidents and emergencies;
- Promoting alternatives to highly toxic and persistent chemicals;
- Filling of gaps in scientific knowledge;
- Elaborating globally harmonized methods for chemical risk assessment; and
- Actions to improve ability to access, interpret and apply scientific knowledge.

The IPCS web site also includes a list of [10 chemicals of public health concern](#) including [Air pollution](#), [Arsenic](#), [Asbestos](#), [Benzene](#), [Cadmium](#), [Dioxin and dioxin-like substances](#), [Inadequate or excess fluoride](#), [Lead](#), [Mercury](#), and [Highly hazardous pesticides](#).

Further information is available through WHO’s ‘concise international chemical assessment documents (CICADs)’ [here](#).

For burden of disease estimates see Prüss-Ustün, Annette, Carolyn Vickers, Pascal Haefliger, and Roberto Bertollini. "Knowns and Unknowns on Burden of Disease Due to Chemicals: A Systematic Review." *Environmental Health* 10, no. 9 (2011).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/1476-069X-10-9>.

PHM comment

Need a more detailed political economy of exposures with industry by industry detail and appropriate regulatory strategies.

Need to mention the Rotterdam Convention and the role of India and Russia in preventing the extension of ‘prior informed consent’ to the export of chrysotile asbestos (see [ROCA](#)).

Notes of discussion at EB138

Item commenced Sixth Meeting, (pm of Day 3, Wed 27 Jan)

Doc: [EB138/18](#)

Secretary: conf paper 7: preambular para 1 bis bis, and PP1 bis and ter: there should not have square brackets. 9bis: there square brackets should be removed. OP2 (p. 6): b, c - h : supporting, strengthening, participation.... h.

Egypt : thanks . Egypt on behalf of Emro. the item is significant to show the health impact of chemicals. we thank the secretariat for this report; we would like say : importance of strengthening engagement of health system; chemical producers and suppliers should give more informations for users and workers , etc; technical and scientist assistant is needed.

Canada: on behalf of region of americas: welcoming the discussion on this item, thanking the secretariat for the report. health sector participation in this field should be enhanced, according to SDGs. The negative impact of chemical is a big burden for the health of people. We need to promote health policies. There are persons that are more exposed to the chemicals, like vulnerable persons: children, women, etc.. We need to improve our in this issue, chemical managements, etc. Roadmap and action for MS: could be build in current efforts and consolidation of health sector.

They decided to include this item in the agenda. underlining the importance of the roadmap. The draft resolution is the result of a good cooperation between the cosponsors.

Liberia: on behalf of 47 african region . through Rwanda commitment identify chemicals as one of burden on health and environment . esp as production of use of chemicals increase. and exposure . this has great impact to public health, illness, disabilities, suicide,

how chemical are managed in safe way ?

lack of regulation and institutional capacity is a serious problem. WHO support in managing chemicals. More regulation and regulating guidance. priority of action

we would like WHO to develop framework of managing chemicals. and control production

we recommend on working strategy on public health .

secretariat report gives 11 basic elements of guidance . we support report

Russian Federation: supporting the necessity to strengthen the health sector in the field of the management of chemicals. This is a fundamental issue. They implemented measures and policies at the national level. There is a commission that has been created in order to ensure security. we need to take more measures at the international level.

Egypt:

Recommences Seventh Meeting (Evening session, Day 3, Wed 27 Jan)

Brazil: supports Canada on behalf of Americas.

China: Due to difference between different countries , . We hope WHO allow help of member state

US: welcome the report, particularly in context of strategic approach to chemicals. references to SDG's. Span and ... co-sponsors of draft of the resolution.

Uruguay: align with statement by...Chemicals should be made in a way that doesn't affect health. major disease burden such as exposure to chemicals. strategic approach. set objectives to engage in sound management of chemicals in entire lifecycle. renewed commitment. strengthen participation health sector, multisectoral framework and facilitating health in all facilities. ms should get support of WHO. draft resolution: secretariat should draw up roadmap. apply effective interventions to apply. we hope EB will adopt resolution presented and hope it will be approved in WHA 69

Zambia: align with AFRO. Welcoming the draft resolution and the proposed roadmap. looking forward the completion of the work. They remain committed to finalize the resolution.

Germany: thank canada and uruguay to bring issue to WHO. we co sponsor resolution together with group of other delegates. this is essential for achieving 2020 goal. Thanks to everyone that helped. Furthermore: WHO enhance leading role. setting aside resource and personnel. chemicals and waste are crosscutting elements of the sustainable agenda.

Colombia: align with AMRO. Recognizing that the sound management of chemicals should be a priority of the WHO, as it is a health issue. Chemicals should be produced in order to no affect environment and health. Underlining the significant reduction of chemical waste. We should support the WHO's role in order to ensure the good management of chemicals and we need to work with the health sector.

DPRK: note that there are still pesticides in controversy. WHO should maintain its position to address toxicity of chemical products. pesticides are used with a big problem for health. toxicity is high. Beware of not having economical interests in chemical products that can affect health

NGOs: Please refer to the [published statements](#).

- International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)
- International Clearinghouse for Birth Defects Surveillance and Research (ICBDSR)

ADG/FWC: since resolution still has to be discussed, I'll be brief. Use and production of chemicals is increasing, many countries still lack regulatory capacity and managerial capacity. Look forward on discussion on friday on finishing of resolution.

Chair: is the board ready to note the report. The report is noted. The item is still open, in order to let more time to address the draft resolution.

Discussion resumed Fourteenth Meeting (pm of day 6) from Seventh Meeting (evening of Day 3)

Docs:

- [EB138/18](#)
- [EB138/CONF.7](#) Draft resolution, *The role of the health sector in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management towards the 2020 goal and beyond*, proposed by Canada, France, Germany, Thailand, USA and Uruguay

CANADA: gives an update. Significant support firstly for the resolution, but a lot of work had to be done. Delegates worked on the draft resolution. There're still points in which we didn't agree yet so we need to take this work in May for WHA. Canada cosponsor. The resolution remains however unfinished.

PANAMAs: also wants to cosponsor the resolution

CHAIR: The board agrees for the draft resolution discuss and to be concluded during the intersessional period and approved in WHA.

Item concluded