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COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane
Task Force on Economic Benefits of Improving Mine Safety
through Extraction and Use of Coal Mine Methane

First session, 29 April 2005

REPORT

I. ATTENDANCE

1. The first session of the Task Force on Economic Benefits of Improving Mine Safety through Extraction and Use of Coal Mine Methane (CMM) was held on 29 April 2005 and attended by representatives from the following UNECE member countries: Germany, Kazakhstan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States of America.
2. Representatives of Australia and China participated under Article XI of the Commission's Terms of Reference.
3. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was represented.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Agenda Item 1)

4. The provisional agenda as contained in document ENERGY/GE.4/2005/2 was adopted.
5. The meeting discussed various proposals for the most appropriate name for the Task Force and after extended debate agreed that the name should be "Task Force on Economic Benefits of Improving Mine Safety through Extraction and Use of Coal Mine Methane".

Note: all documentation and presentations delivered at the meeting are available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/ie/se/coal/cmm.html>

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III. ELECTION OF OFFICERS (Agenda Item 2)

6. The Bureau was elected as follows: Mr. Raymond Pilcher (United States of America) was elected Chairman and Mr. Grigoriy Present (Kazakhstan) was elected Vice-Chairman.

IV. MEMBERSHIP OF TASK FORCE (Agenda Item 3)

7. The Chairman noted that apologies had been received from Mr. Thomas Breheny (UK Coal, United Kingdom), Mr. Steve Marler (US Department of Labor, United States), Mr. Hiroaki Hirasawa (JCOAL, Japan) and Mr. Dac PHUNG MANH (Institute of Mining Science and Technology, Vietnam) and confirmed that they had all expressed a desire to be included in the membership of the Task Force.

8. The meeting discussed the issue of the membership of the Task Force. It was agreed that in order to achieve meaningful outcomes it would be important that academia, the private sector, and the regulatory community, including the insurance industry, investors and vendors, were all adequately represented.

9. The representative from the ILO confirmed its wish to be included in the membership of the Task Force and that the ILO was fully supportive of the goals of this group since the issue of improving mine safety was also on its agenda and hence there were clearly a number of areas of potential synergy.

10. The ILO representative presented a summary of the ILO's activities in the area of health and safety in the mining sector, including relevant ILO codes of practice and handbooks.

11. The ILO representative drew attention to the ILO Code on Safety and Health in Coal Mines (1985) and advised that this would be updated in 2006. He invited the Task Force to assist in the preparation of the revised text.

12. The meeting:

- (i) took note with appreciation of the support offered by the ILO representative and also the information provided on ILO activities;
- (ii) requested that the ILO Code on Safety and Health in Coal Mines (1985) be circulated to the Task Force; and
- (iii) agreed on the need to ensure academia, the private sector and the regulatory community are adequately represented and requested the assistance of existing Task Force members to facilitate this.

V. TERMS OF REFERENCE (Agenda Item 4)

13. The meeting agreed upon the importance of the Task Force having brief Terms of Reference that would provide a general guide for steering its work and activities.

14. Draft Terms of Reference prepared during the meeting are annexed to this report and will be agreed upon at the next meeting.

VI. OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

(Agenda Item 5)

15. The meeting discussed in detail the short- and long-term objectives and priorities for the Task Force.

16. The key objectives were identified as follows:

(i) Dedicated Membership

The need to establish a dedicated membership was underlined as one of the key initial priorities. In particular, the importance of engaging coal mine operators was highlighted and various countries committed to make contact with their national operators and coal associations to facilitate this.

(ii) Development of UN Guidelines on “Avoiding and Minimising the Impact of Mine Explosions” based on a Series of Case Studies

(a) Case Studies

The meeting discussed in detail the development of such a series of case studies. The case studies would for example provide concrete examples of given coal mines and serve to illustrate the whole range of conditions that could occur in gassy mines, the technologies that have been implemented, understanding which technologies work best for a given condition, in the event of an accident/explosion the social and economic impact of this. Such a range of case studies would then enable the practices to be identified that will result in beneficial economic and social outcomes for gassy mines. It was then proposed that it would be useful for a template to be prepared for the case studies to ensure that all the required information was included and covered by the contributors. The Chairman, in collaboration with the secretariat, undertook to prepare such a template as soon as practicable.

(b) UN Guidelines on “Avoiding and Minimising the Impact of Mine Explosions”

The meeting discussed the usefulness and value of preparing a set of non-legally binding UN Guidelines on “Avoiding and Minimising the Impact of Mine Explosions”. The Guidelines would be drafted based on the information provided in the series of case studies and would seek to categorise world experience in mining under gassy conditions, highlighting the range of practices and technologies that can usefully be employed to increase both safety and productivity at the mine site. It was stressed that the Guidelines should not be overly specific or prescriptive. The meeting agreed that the development of Guidelines was a longer-term objective for the Task Force.

(iii) Promotional CD-ROM

The meeting discussed the usefulness of producing a CD-ROM or other electronic publication to promote the issue of mining under gassy conditions and to draw attention to the economic benefits of improving mine safety through the extraction and use of CMM. It was proposed that it would be beneficial to include the case studies and the Guidelines on such a CD-ROM. The meeting agreed upon the benefits of producing such an electronic publication and noted that to undertake such an activity would require extrabudgetary funds.

(iv) Workshops

The meeting agreed it would be useful to undertake a series of national and/or regional workshops to facilitate understanding and implementation of the Guidelines.

(v) Website

The meeting agreed that added value would be provided to the Task Force by creating a series of dedicated pages on the UNECE website to promote the work of the group and to also highlight the benefits of extraction and use of CMM. The secretariat undertook to facilitate this.

VII. PROGRAMME OF WORK

(Agenda Item 6)

17. The meeting discussed and agreed upon its Programme of Work for the coming six months, notably:

- (i) to seek to identify the funding needs of discrete projects to be undertaken by the Task Force and to draw up a list of potential donors; and
- (ii) to develop a template for the Case Studies and then circulate this template to those countries that have indicated their willingness to prepare and submit a Study. Initial expressions of interest in preparing case studies were received from a number of countries including: Australia, China, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and the United States. Germany and Poland also indicated that they would explore the possibility of identifying organisations potentially willing to be involved in this activity.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS

(Agenda Item 7)

17. The meeting discussed the frequency of meetings of the Task Force. In view of the ambitious goals of the Task Force and the level of work to be undertaken it was proposed that if it proved practicable efforts should be made to meet twice per annum.

18. The meeting noted that the second session of the Task Force will be held in Geneva on 14 November 2005, immediately prior to the second session of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane.

ANNEX

TASK FORCE ON THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF IMPROVING MINE SAFETY THROUGH EXTRACTION AND USE OF COAL MINE METHANE

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Task Force on the Economic Benefits of Improving Mine Safety through Extraction and Use of Coal Mine Methane was launched in April 2005 to specifically support the activities of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane in the area of improving mine safety through extraction and use of coal mine methane. The Task Force, which will comprise experts from the technical, business and regulatory communities, will report on its activities to the annual sessions of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane.

The Task Force will seek to:

- (i) establish a clear linkage between the economic benefits and the mining of gassy coal seams based on the safe drainage and use of the gas, and to facilitate this through the establishment of a dedicated membership from the technical, business and regulatory communities;
- (ii) develop a number of focussed case studies that will then serve to provide the basis for the elaboration of a set of UN Guidelines on “Avoidance and Minimising Impact of Mine Explosions and Other Impacts of Mine Gas”; and
- (iii) cooperate and work with the governments of target countries and the global mining industry in developing the economic justifications for implementing incentives to increase the extraction and use of coal mine methane.