



Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)

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Second session

Nairobi, 4–8 October 2004

Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Further development of a strategic approach to international chemicals management

Information paper from the International Labour Organization

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat has the honour to circulate, in the annex to the present note, an information paper from the International Labour Organization prepared for the Preparatory Committee at its second session.

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ILO Information Paper for the 2nd Preparatory Committee for a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), Nairobi, 4-8 October 2004

Chemicals have become an important part of our life, sustaining many of our activities, preventing and controlling many diseases and increasing agricultural productivity. However one cannot ignore the fact that many of these chemicals may, especially if not properly used, endanger our health and poison our environment.

It has been estimated that approximately one thousand new chemicals come onto the market every year, and about 100 000 chemical substances are used on a global scale. These chemicals are usually found as mixtures in commercial products. One to two million such products or trade names exist in most industrialized countries. More substances and rising production mean more storage, transport, handling, use and disposal of chemicals.

Many substances that are used regularly at work will contain chemicals, which, if not handled correctly, can cause harm. The ILO estimates that of the 2 million fatalities related to work each year, 439,000 are caused by chemicals and of the 160 million cases of work-related disease, 35 million are due to chemicals¹. Widespread concern over fatalities and work-related disease resulting from chemicals is on the rise due to the rapidly increasing inventory of chemicals in commercial use, especially in developing countries where adequate control measures are often unavailable.

These statistics show that there is now an even greater need for a strategic approach to international chemicals management, which the ILO recognized and endorsed at its 91st session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2003. At this session of the ILC, the ILO established a “Global Strategy and Action Plan on Occupational Safety and Health²” where chemical safety has a major role. The purpose is to place safety and health at work high on the agenda, and advocate the sound management of safety and health at both the enterprise and national levels with a view of building and maintaining a safety and health culture. In relation to chemicals, this would translate into the sound management of chemicals at both the enterprise and nationally, with a view to building a chemicals safety culture.

At this ILC session, the ILO adopted a 5-component toolbox and action plan, which we believe is relevant to, and should form part of a Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. These are:

1. Promotion, awareness raising and advocacy (including to the general public, high-level policy makers, heads of state etc.
2. ILO instruments, the ratification and adaptation of them to national laws and regulations, as well as their enforcement. The ILO has established a number of conventions, recommendations and codes of practice related to chemical safety, in particular Convention No. 170 on Safety and Health in the use of Chemicals (which deals with the sound management of chemicals at the national and enterprise level) and Convention No. 174 on the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents (which was developed as a result of the Bhopal disaster). A full listing can be found in the INF document: List of relevant Background Documents.
3. Technical assistance and cooperation. It is important to provide technical advisory and financial support to developing countries and countries in transition for the timely strengthening of their national capacities and programmes in the field of chemical safety (e.g. through projects such as ship breaking, safety culture and CSR/Global Compact etc.).
4. Knowledge development, management and dissemination, for example, through the ILO’s information center network of some 130 national and collaborating centers.
5. International collaboration, in particular, through the IOMC, IPCS and IFCS in the field of chemical safety but also with the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA).

¹ These statistics were prepared for the report of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2004. The full report, “Safe Work and Safety Culture” may be found in English, French, Spanish and German on the ILO website at the following URL: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/worldday/products04/report04.htm>

² Full text of the Global Strategy and Action Plan on Occupational Safety and Health is available at the following URL: <http://www.ilo.org/safework>

We propose, that the essential elements of the SAICM should follow a two-tiered approach:

- a. Firstly, a global vision, statement or policy, in the form of a declaration, which would form the basis of a global programme and action plan (including the five elements listed above); and,
- b. Action at the national level through the formulation of a national vision, policy and programme based on national chemicals profiles, established targets including input, process and outcome indicators. For this to be possible, the relevant infrastructure and collaborative mechanisms should be established, responsibilities and accountabilities set and resources allocated. We are expecting industries and enterprises to establish sound management systems, and governments to take leadership in the systematic management of chemical safety.

In addition to the strategic tools contained in the toolbox approach (1 to 5 above), the concrete substance issues for SAICM that the ILO believes are vital are as follows:

- a. The GHS and its corresponding national implementation;
 - b. Chemical Safety Data Sheets on products and mixtures, based on GHS classifications and the International Chemical Safety cards of the IPCS;
 - c. Eliminating workplace hazards due to chemicals through simple, practical methods, in particular chemical control banding; and,
 - d. Eliminating, as a priority, any child labour that involves hazardous substances.
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