



United Nations Environment Programme

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ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

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PRESS RELEASE

Experts agree on guidelines on how to reduce or eliminate the release of dioxin, furans and other toxic pollutants into the environment

Tokyo, 16 October 2004 – A group of international experts meeting here from 11 – 16 October completed guidelines on best available techniques and best environmental practices for reducing or eliminating the unintentional release of polychlorinated dioxins and furans, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenols) and hexachlorobenzene.

“The guidelines will empower governments to protect human health and the environment from some of the most dangerous chemicals ever known,” said John Whitelaw, Deputy of UNEP’s Chemicals Branch.

According Sergio Vives of the Government of Chile, co-chair of the experts meeting, “These guidelines are the first important step in the long fight to reduce dioxins and furans in developing countries.”

These highly toxic and widespread chemicals cause serious harm and even death in both humans and wildlife. Dioxins and furans can cause cancer in particular the dioxin, 2,3,7,8 TCDD, which is classified as a category one carcinogen (the highest level) by the International Agency for Research on Cancer because it is known to cause cancer in humans. Dioxins and furans also weaken the human immune system, cause neurological and reproductive disorders, and disrupt hormones.

Because dioxins and furans are unwanted by-products, there is little hard data on how much is actually emitted or released. But increased worldwide monitoring over the past several years has convinced governments that the risks these chemicals pose to the environment and to human health are much greater and more widespread than previously believed.

Human exposures to dioxins and furans recorded in industrialized countries are disturbingly high: according to the European Union, its citizens are consuming 60 to 130% of the daily tolerable intake recommended by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization. While most human exposure occurs through eating food, particularly meat and dairy products, harvest residues, open garbage burning, and forest fires all contribute.

Polychlorinated dioxins and furans are families of chemical by-products that have no commercial use. They are released during the manufacture of certain pesticides and other chemicals, the recycling of certain metals, and the bleaching of pulp and paper. They are also found in automobile smoke and open fires due to incomplete combustion.

The unintended release of PCBs and hexachlorobenzene (which, unlike dioxins and furans, are also produced intentionally) is more difficult to calculate using currently available scientific data, however, efforts to reduce or eliminate releases of dioxins and furans will likely result in their reduced releases as well.

The guidelines will recommend a range of "best environmental practices" and "best available techniques", including improved production technologies, bans on chemicals known to be contaminated with dioxins and furans, improved methods for flue-gas cleaning, better treatment of wastes and sewage sludge, process changes (such as moving to closed systems), greater efficiency of combustion, and so forth.

As part of implementing the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, governments are to develop action plans to reduce or eliminate the release of unintentional persistent organic pollutants. These plans are to promote and in some cases require the use of best available techniques and best environmental practices and they are to take into account the guidelines just completed in doing so.

The guidelines are expected to be formally adopted governments at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Stockholm Convention to be held from 2 to 6 May 2005 in Punta del Este, Uruguay. The Convention requires governments to take steps to reduce the release of dioxins and furans with the goal of their "continuing minimization and, where feasible, ultimate elimination" and the guidelines are an important tool to help them.