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Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste

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Open-ended Working Group of the Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste
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Item 3 (e) of the provisional agenda*

Global Framework on Chemicals: emerging policy issues and issues of concern

Emerging policy issues and issues of concern

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. At its fifth session, held in Bonn, Germany, in September 2023, the International Conference on Chemicals Management adopted resolution V/5 on emerging policy issues and issues of concern, in which it invited the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) and its participating organizations to submit to the International Conference of the Global Framework on Chemicals a report including updates on progress achieved in relation to the existing emerging policy issues and other issues of concern.

II. Activities to implement the resolution

2. As preliminary input to the report requested in paragraph 4 of resolution V/5, participating organizations of IOMC have submitted the proposals below in relation to the existing emerging policy issues and other issues of concern.

A. Lead in paint

Contribution by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization (UNEP and WHO propose to continue and UNEP proposes to expand to additional sources of exposure to lead)

3. The issue of lead in paint remains a critical environmental and health concern, especially for vulnerable populations such as children. The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint has been successful, with 94 countries having adopted legislation, and has worked closely with 43 private-sector partners (small and medium-sized enterprises) to support pilot testing of the reformulation of their paints. Additional efforts are needed, however, to achieve the adoption of lead paint laws globally and replicate the success of removing lead in fuel. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as lead agencies for this issue, propose to continue to address lead in paint as an issue of concern under the Global Framework on Chemicals – for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste. UNEP suggests addressing lead more comprehensively by incorporating broader lead exposure risks, which would align with initiatives such

* UNEP/GFC/OEWG.1/1.

as the Partnership for a Lead-free Future. By expanding the scope to include all lead-related environmental and health risks and sources, this initiative could drive more cohesive and unified global action regarding exposure to lead, advancing efforts to eliminate lead from paint while addressing other key sources of lead contamination.

B. Chemicals in products

Contribution by the United Nations Environment Programme

4. Chemicals in products are a critical issue that concerns the safety of consumer goods, supply chains and environmental impacts. Through a project carried out under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and funded mainly by the Global Environment Facility, as well as through other initiatives, UNEP has coordinated the development of tools to address the issue, including an information hub[1] for stakeholders in the building and construction sector; a toolkit to support regulation and compliance in the toys sector;[2] global guidance for sustainable public procurement in the electronics and buildings sector;[3] a USEtox-based model for assessing the use of chemicals in building products; and an eco-innovation manual for electronics.[4] It has also coordinated the preparation of reports compiling knowledge on the topic of chemicals in products and ways of addressing it, including a report on chemicals of concern and potential alternatives in the building sector;[5] a global guide for banks on setting up green mortgages;[6] a report on regulatory approaches addressing chemicals of concern in electronics, and policy recommendations;[7] a report on how ecolabels address the issue of chemicals of concern and recommendations for further harmonization and integration;[8] and a report reviewing toy safety policies and regulations in low- and middle-income countries.[9] UNEP is implementing a programme on eliminating hazardous chemicals from the fashion and construction value chains, supported by the Global Environment Facility. UNEP recommends continuing efforts to address this issue until it can be fully integrated into sectoral work under the Framework. This ongoing focus will ensure continuity in addressing the issue of hazardous chemicals present in products until the establishment of the broader Framework implementation programmes, which could provide a more comprehensive approach.

C. Nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials

Contribution by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, with additional input from the World Health Organization

5. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) have agreed to take the lead role in implementing resolution II/4, which established “nano” as an emerging policy issue. As synthesized in a 2020 report by UNEP, many guidance documents on assessing the safety of nanomaterials have been developed (such as those from the OECD nanosafety programme), numerous capacity building activities and technical assistance events have been organized (e.g. by UNITAR), and many countries have adapted their regulatory activities to take nanomaterials into account, in line with the OECD Recommendation of the Council on the Safety Testing and Assessment of Manufactured Nanomaterials. WHO issued guidelines in 2017 on protecting workers from potential risks of manufactured nanomaterials. OECD continues to develop publicly accessible guidance documents on nanomaterials and advanced materials to facilitate regulatory preparedness. UNITAR continues to make available its materials and its e-learning course and is collaborating with the secretariat of the

[1] https://saicmknowledge.org/page/buildings-infohub.

[2] https://saicmknowledge.org/chemicals-management-toolkit-toy-sector.

[3] https://saicmknowledge.org/sites/default/files/resources/Sustainable%20Procurement%20of%20Electronics%20A%20Progressive%20Approach%20to%20Chemicals%20of%20Concern.pdf.

[4] https://saicmknowledge.org/sites/default/files/resources/UNEP_Eco%E2%80%94i_Manual_Electronics_Supplement_.pdf.

[5] https://saicmknowledge.org/sites/default/files/publications/Del_2.1.1_CoC_in_building_products_final.pdf.

[6] https://saicmknowledge.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sustainable%20Building%20Finance-supporting%20green%20mortgage%20development%20in%20Sri%20Lanka%202.pdf.

[7] https://saicmknowledge.org/sites/default/files/publications/201223_UNEP_regulatory_review_CoC_Electronics_Final.pdf.

[8] https://saicmknowledge.org/sites/default/files/publications/EL%20and%20CoC%20in%20electronics.pdf.

[9] https://saicmknowledge.org/library/review-chemicals-related-toy-safety-policies-and-regulations-selected-low-and-middle-income.

Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants to address the issue of waste containing nanomaterials under the Basel Convention. Although the efforts of IOMC participating organizations in this area will continue, OECD and UNITAR propose not to keep nanotechnologies and manufactured nanomaterials as an issue of concern under the Framework.

D. Hazardous substances within the life cycle of electrical and electronic products

Contribution by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization

6. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) recognizes the importance of addressing hazardous substances in the life cycle of electrical and electronic products (HSLEEP) and proposes that this emerging policy issue continue be recognized as an issue of concern until it is integrated into Framework implementation programmes. By its mandate, UNIDO focuses its interventions on value chains and is promoting cooperation in addressing the topic. Hazardous chemicals in electronics and electrical products represent a priority sector within the Framework. There is a need to accelerate the adoption of measures by governments and value chain stakeholders to reduce the use of chemicals of concern in electronics products. An integrated programme on this value chain is under development, led by UNIDO, with financial support from the Global Environment Facility.

E. Managing perfluorinated chemicals and the transition to safer alternatives

Contribution by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

7. Much progress has been made by all stakeholders in the management of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The information available on PFAS and potential alternatives has increased significantly in recent years, and ever more countries are regulating certain PFAS or initiating regulatory information calls. The activities of the OECD Global PFAS Group have resulted in the provision of technical information to support decision-making and have facilitated information exchange. Public awareness of the presence of PFAS in the environment has also increased dramatically through media reports on “forever chemicals”. Given the economic importance of this family of substances, a convergence of countries’ risk management activities is desirable. OECD will continue to work on PFAS, especially on risk management and the transition towards safer alternatives. WHO is conducting a landscape review to identify key health effects and key ingested PFAS, along with proposing a methodology to derive health-based guidance values for PFAS, including consideration of individual PFAS and PFAS mixtures. The work is being overseen by the WHO Technical Advisory Group on PFAS Assessment. UNEP is overseeing projects to help countries transition towards safer alternatives (e.g. in fire-fighting foam). It is therefore proposed that work on PFAS as a dedicated issue of concern continue under the Framework. OECD, WHO and UNEP are willing to take the lead role. It is proposed that the group simply continue its work and report to the Conference at each session. The Global PFAS Group has worked well until now and is already open to all stakeholders, thus maintaining the spirit of the Framework.

F. Highly hazardous pesticides

Contribution by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization

8. The need to continue work on highly hazardous pesticides has been recognized by the call for a global alliance on highly hazardous pesticides under the Framework. Until this global movement builds sufficient momentum, it is proposed that highly hazardous pesticides continue to be addressed as an issue of concern under the Framework.

G. Endocrine-disrupting chemicals

Contribution by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Health Organization

9. Endocrine-disrupting chemicals continue to pose significant risks to human health and the environment, particularly in relation to hormone disruption and reproductive health. UNEP, with support from the Global Environment Facility, is supporting the development of guidance and knowledge to assist countries in implementing measures to regulate emerging policy issues such as endocrine-disrupting chemicals in order to accelerate progress and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, the ongoing update of the *State of the Science of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals 2012* report by UNEP and WHO is critical to furthering global awareness and action on endocrine-disrupting chemicals, as it provides a scientific basis for regulatory and preventive measures and considerations regarding social and economic determinants. This continued focus will support global efforts to limit exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals and reduce the associated risks. OECD continues to develop technical tools that allow countries to identify endocrine-disrupting chemicals. The Economic and Social Council's Subcommittee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals is investigating the possibility of developing a separate hazard class for endocrine disruptors. OECD, UNEP and WHO recommend continuing work on endocrine-disrupting chemicals as an issue of concern due to the evolving science and understanding of those chemicals.

H. Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants

Contribution by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

10. Environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants represent an emerging issue linked to the contamination of water, soil and ecosystems with pharmaceuticals. UNEP is supporting the development of guidance and knowledge to assist countries in implementing measures to regulate emerging policy issues such as that of environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants in order to accelerate progress and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. That work is being supported by funding from various sources, including the Global Environment Facility. OECD has developed policy recommendations for reducing the release of environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants into surface water. WHO is an important partner in developing and disseminating guidance on managing waste from antibiotics manufacturing and in healthcare facilities. OECD, UNEP and WHO recommend continuing this initiative until it can be fully integrated into the Framework implementation programmes. The initiative is crucial for reducing the amount of pharmaceuticals in the environment and addressing the environmental persistence of pharmaceuticals and their role in contributing to antimicrobial resistance, which is a growing global health threat. In September 2024, the General Assembly adopted the political declaration of the high-level meeting on antimicrobial resistance,[10] which included a request to update the Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, which could serve as starting point for addressing the pharmaceutical component of antimicrobial resistance. The One Health approach requires joint efforts by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNEP, WHO and the World Organization for Animal Health. If the Framework implementation programme on pharmaceuticals is developed, the issue of environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants could be integrated into that broader framework, potentially linking it with antimicrobial resistance and other chemical risk issues.

III. Proposed action

11. The Open-ended Working Group may wish to:

(a) *Express appreciation* to the participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals for their leading role in conducting work on the various emerging policy issues and issues of concern within their respective purviews;

(b) *Request* the participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals to prepare the report called for in paragraph 4 of resolution V/5, on emerging policy issues and issues of concern, including workplans, targets and indicators, and

[10] General Assembly resolution 79/2, annex.

timelines, for the emerging policy issues that, in their estimation, should continue to be addressed, for consideration by the International Conference of the Global Framework on Chemicals;

(c) *Invite* the relevant stakeholders to consider the reports submitted and provide guidance to the participating organizations of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals for the continued implementation of resolution V/5 until the Conference takes a final decision on the future of each of the emerging policy issues.