

# PCBs: The Forgotten Legacy

## A Threat to Human Health and the Environment

### Why is PCB an important issue?

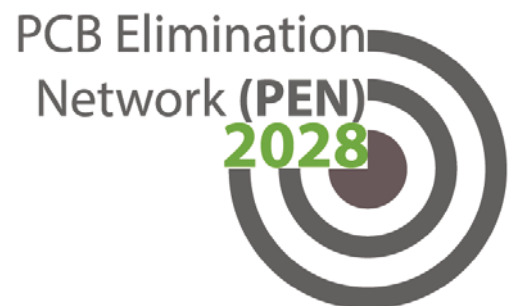
- Due to inflammability, electric conductivity, and other characteristics, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) were **widely used** in closed applications (notably transformers and capacitors) and to a lesser extent in open applications (e.g. paints).
- Applications containing or contaminated with PCB are still in use worldwide.
- PCB are **carcinogens** and endocrine disruptors.
- Concentrations far above WHO safety levels have been found in human milk worldwide.
- PCB were listed among the 12 initial POPs of the **Stockholm Convention**. Parties have to phase out the use by 2025 and ensure the environmentally sound management of PCB by 2028.



PCB-containing equipment after a fire accident  
(Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, field visit of the interagency team, 2015)

### What is the PCB Elimination Network?

The PCB Elimination Network (PEN), coordinated by the Science and Risk Unit, provides **guidance and information** to countries in their efforts to phase out and dispose PCB. Among others, the PEN developed guidance documents and information materials.



### What are the priorities for action?

**Inventories:** Accurate and complete inventories are critical to inform policy-making.

**Phase-out:** Equipment that is still in use should be replaced to avoid exposure and contamination.

**Environmentally sound management of PCB**

**Handling:** Equipment must be maintained and stored in a sound manner to avoid accidents.

**Disposal:** Technologies for decontamination and final disposal are available.