

SAICM and emerging policy issues

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The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is a policy framework that has been adopted by the international community to promote chemical safety. It has the overall objectives of achieving the goal set by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, that chemicals should be used and produced in ways that minimize significant adverse effects on human health and the environment. The International Conference on Chemicals Management will undertake periodic reviews of the Strategic Approach. The second session of the Conference will be held in Geneva, 11-15 May 2009.

One of the functions of the International Conference on Chemicals Management set out in paragraph 24 of the Overarching Policy Strategy of SAICM is “to focus attention and call for appropriate action on emerging policy issues as they arise and to forge consensus on priorities for cooperative action.”

Paragraphs 14 (g) and 15 (g) of the Overarching Policy Strategy call, respectively, for new and emerging issues of global concern to be sufficiently addressed by means of appropriate mechanisms, and for an acceleration of the pace of scientific research on identifying and assessing the effects of chemicals on human beings and the environment, including emerging issues.

The Conference has not yet defined the term “emerging policy issue”, but it may be understood to be an issue involving the production, distribution and use of chemicals, which has not yet been generally recognized or sufficiently addressed, but which may have significant adverse effects on human beings and/or the environment.

A short questionnaire was prepared by the secretariat as a means for Strategic Approach stakeholders to propose “emerging policy issues” for consideration by the Conference at its second session. The questionnaire was brought to the attention of Strategic Approach stakeholders by email, by discussion at appropriate regional meetings, and by publication on the Strategic Approach website. Submissions were received from 21 stakeholders.

A compilation of the submissions received from stakeholders to the questionnaire on emerging policy issues and an overview and summary of the issues raised in the submissions are available on the SAICM website (www.saicm.org)

Following informal discussions held in Rome on the 23 and 24 October 2008 on preparations for the second session of the Conference, Strategic Approach stakeholders decided that the next step should be for the secretariat to screen the nominated emerging policy issues in a transparent manner. The results of the screening would be circulated for consultation. To facilitate this consultation, the secretariat is working with the “friends of the secretariat,” an informal planning group convened earlier to assist with preparation of the second session of the Conference. This group comprises regional focal points, and representatives of Governments, non-government organizations and intergovernmental organizations. This group is being invited to assist in identifying priority emerging policy issues for detailed consideration at the second session of the Conference.

The second session of the Conference would also consider a longer-term procedure for the modalities of carrying out its functions with regard to emerging policy issues which would include revised criteria for priority setting, to be developed as necessary.

The secretariat completed an initial screening of the nominated priority issues it had earlier received and arranged a teleconference on 27 November 2008 for further discussions with SAICM stakeholders. The results of this work will be presented to the present Workshop.

The SAICM website can be consulted to find information on preparations for the second session of the Conference, including the work on emerging issues. Both the issue of “chemicals in products” and the “management of perfluorinated chemicals” are among those currently being assessed for possible detailed consideration of the Conference. The present workshops may wish to provide recommendations and information from their proceedings to assist further preparation for the consideration of emerging policy issues at the upcoming second session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (11-15 May 2009).
