

## **Brief background and status of the Chemicals in Products project**

**– UNEP/DTIE/Chemicals Branch, October 2012**

### **Why a Chemicals in Products project?**

The use of chemicals in products is ubiquitous: it would be difficult to find products, any products, manufactured today which do not contain chemicals. Most of these chemicals are part of the product design and are added intentionally to enhance the product functionality or performance. They can also be in the products from the fabrication process or as impurities. Most are benign, but many are of concern due to known or suspected risks. The international trade in products containing these chemicals results in their global distribution, along with the health and environmental impacts which may follow. From toys and furniture to electronic equipment and automobiles, addressing the problems and challenges posed by these chemicals in products require action on many levels, involving many partners.

Informed decision-making requires sufficient and reliable information on chemicals in products, and many public and private sector organizations have recognized this critical need. As a step in addressing this need, in May 2009 the second session of the International Conference of Chemicals Management (ICCM2) recognized access to information on chemicals contained in products as a priority emerging chemicals-policy issue, and adopted a resolution to implement a Chemicals in Products (CiP) project.

### **A bit of history – the first intersessional period (from ICCM2 in 2009 to ICCM3 in 2012)**

ICCM2 invited UNEP to lead and facilitate the project with the mandate to:

- Collect and review existing information on information systems pertaining to chemicals in products including but not limited to regulations, standards and industry practices;

- Assess that information in relation to the needs of all relevant stakeholders and identify gaps;

- Develop specific recommendations for actions to promote implementation of the Strategic Approach with regard to such information, incorporating identified priorities and access and delivery mechanisms;

UNEP undertook in 2009 broad stakeholder consultations (among *inter alia* business and industry, public interest groups and governments) to prioritize actions under the CiP project. As well a global study was undertaken of stakeholder information needs, existing information systems and gaps, and also analyzing drivers and lessons learned from current chemicals in product information exchange. The results of these discussions and research were to identify priority sectors for a first round of in-depth study; textiles, electronics, toys and construction materials were identified as the four top priority sectors.

Case studies in the four priority sectors described the extent of existing chemicals in products information exchange, as well as stakeholder uses and needs and associated gaps for this information. A 2010 consultation meeting among the research teams of the different sectors,

business sector representatives and other stakeholders - including numerous holders of chemicals in product information - took place during the course of these studies.

### **Findings from the first intersessional period and recommended next steps**

The findings of the first intersessional period reveal considerable efforts which are ongoing in numerous products sectors to know and disclose the chemicals that are in products, though frequently the emphasis is more on ensuring and communicating that certain chemicals are *not* in the products. These efforts differ widely both between and within product sectors, with each sector typically having its own particular set of chemicals content issues and legislation. These often drive the initial efforts in information exchange for a sector: individual companies (typically brands) will frequently then become the sector leaders in knowing more about the chemicals in their products.

Another important conclusion is that in the manufacturing phase of many products, there are efforts to move chemicals information through this phase. Chemicals manufacturers are in many cases supplying data - pushing data - about the chemicals they supply to their customers at the beginning of the production cycle, and this includes hazard and safe use data. At the other end of the production cycle are the brand owners and others who sell the manufactured articles. These actors are responsible for placing safe products on the market, and so spend considerable effort to obtain chemical content information from their supply chains and through product testing. So they are trying to 'pull' information out of the manufacturing phase.

The reality is that frequently in the production of an article information on the incorporated chemicals does not flow with the article, but is lost somewhere between the raw materials and the finished article. The reasons for this lack of information flow are numerous, with the complexity of supply chains, the complex and often specialized nature of the chemicals information and the lack of drivers through the production chains identified as major obstacles.

The results of the CiP project studies and discussions, also summarized in a synthesis report, were considered by a wide range of stakeholders at a Workshop in March 2011: this key event suggested the development of a non-legally binding framework (later referred to as the Chemicals in Products programme, or "CiP programme") to facilitate the exchange of product chemicals information among stakeholders.

UNEP considered the above work and findings to develop its report on the project and recommendations for future cooperative actions. These were presented to the SAICM Open-Ended Working Group in November 2011 and to the third session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM3) in September 2012.

### **ICCM3 and the intersessional period from 2012 to 2015**

ICCM3 reviewed the findings and generally endorsed UNEP's proposed recommendations for future actions. More specifically, the Conference invited UNEP to continue to lead the CiP

project and mandated the project (in the next intersessional period, prior to ICCM4) to develop a proposal for an international *CiP programme*<sup>1</sup>. This CiP programme will:

- a) Identify the roles and suggestions for responsibilities of the major stakeholder groups while providing for flexible and differentiated approaches to meet the needs of individual sectors and individual stakeholder groups throughout the product life-cycle, with special attention paid to the needs of vulnerable populations, and developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- b) Develop guidance on what information could be transferred and how information access and exchange could take place to meet the needs of different stakeholder groups throughout the product life-cycle; considering best practices and successful experiences and taking into account paragraph 15 (c) of the Overarching Policy Strategy of the Strategic Approach;
- c) Implement pilot project(s) to demonstrate the applicability of the guidance developed under the proposed CiP programme in one or more of the priority sectors,<sup>2</sup> subject to stakeholder participation and available resources; and
- d) Implement activities that seek to raise consumer awareness and gain broader support from business, industry and other stakeholders.

In the course of the CiP project considerable awareness raising and outreach has taken place. These (continuing) efforts aim to connect with stakeholders which are critical for implementing future cooperative actions: they include product sector manufacturers and brands, chemicals formulators and others. This outreach has identified many product sector initiatives – frequently aimed at improving products sustainability – where future CiP programme activities could be complementary. These stakeholders have not historically been strongly engaged in discussions under SAICM and so these discussions also represent an opportunity for the SAICM community to participate in diverse forums with a range of chemicals-using sectors.

### **On line resources**

The results of the extensive discussions on CiP information needs, uses and gaps, the sector case studies and the global study of the project, the synthesis of findings of the project and the eventual project outputs as the CiP project responds to the mandate of ICCM3 can be found on the project web site:

<http://www.unep.org/hazardoussubstances/UNEPsWork/ChemicalsInProductsproject/tabid/56141/Default.aspx>

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<sup>1</sup> An activity of the CiP project (which started in 2009) will be to develop the CiP programme, which will have the aim of facilitating and guiding the provision, availability and access to relevant information on chemicals in products among all stakeholder groups. See full resolution text on [www.saicm.org](http://www.saicm.org)

<sup>2</sup> Building materials, electronics, textiles and toys.