



## Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste in the context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has, once again, shed light on the indispensable nature of the sound management of chemicals and waste to keep the environment clean and people healthy. But the pandemic has also placed significant pressure on the systems that have been put in place by countries to address the sound management of chemicals and waste by exposing existing gaps and highlighting areas where urgent action and continued investment may be needed to strengthen the relevant institutional structures.

Waste management has been deemed an essential public service in many countries and plays a vital role in the pandemic response. There has been a surge in the disposal of medical waste and disposable personal protective equipment from clinics and hospitals, which have been treating COVID-19 patients. At the same time, with many people also recovering from the disease at home, there's also a good chance that potentially infectious household waste could be entering treatment streams. This may have an impact on waste management workers and collectors who might not have the necessary training or equipment to make sure that health and safety procedures are in place to protect them from potentially infectious waste. Furthermore, both medical and household waste may contain mercury due to the disposal of widely-used mercury containing products such as thermometers and other medical equipment.

Meanwhile, with more people looking to protect themselves from catching COVID-19, there's been an increase in the production and use of chemicals like biocides, disinfectants and household cleaning products. The safe use and disposal of such chemicals is essential for keeping people healthy and maintaining a clean environment – otherwise, we could see issues like antibiotic resistance and contamination of water sources start to emerge.

Working within its mandate to support countries strengthening their national institutions, the Special Programme stands in a unique position to provide funding to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to create and implement projects which focus on addressing existing systemic weaknesses and gaps related to the sound management of chemicals and waste that have been brought to light following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing such issues through Special Programme projects will also contribute to countries fulfilling the obligations and objectives of the Basel Convention as it relates to the management of waste as well as the Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and the Minamata Convention. It will also go towards achieving the SAICM 2020 goal and beyond.

The deadline for submitting applications for the fourth round of funding from the Special Programme has been extended to 4 September 2020. Countries may wish to submit projects that implement activities which address existing systemic weaknesses and gaps related to the sound management of chemicals and waste that have been highlighted following the COVID-19 pandemic. This may include, amongst other things:

- Developing national legislation putting in place policies for the responsibilities and best practices of relevant stakeholders with respect to the safe management of healthcare waste from its collection to where and how it will be treated. [Technical](#)

[Guidance](#) on this topic is available through the Basel Convention, and also form part of obligations under the Minamata Convention on Mercury;

- Developing national legislation for household waste and putting in place policies for the establishment of formal household waste collection mechanisms that follow best practice guidelines, including the development to training schemes for the protection of waste management workers and collectors including in recycling practices. [Draft Guidance](#) on the management of household waste is available through the Basel Convention;
- Assessing and reviewing existing legislation related to the transboundary movement of hazardous waste;
- Assessing regulatory needs relating to eliminating the manufacture, import and export of mercury-containing products in the health care sector as called for in the Minamata Convention;
- Assessing and reviewing legislation related to the responsibilities in conducting chemicals risk assessments and provide risk reduction recommendations in the context of production and marketing of chemicals that are destined for use as biocides, disinfectants and household cleaning products;
- Developing regulations on air pollution control for mercury-emitting sectors, including coal-fired power plants and incineration of mercury containing waste;
- Raising awareness and increasing the knowledge on the positive impact of the sound management of chemicals and waste towards facilitating the the maintenance of healthy populations and the environment.
- Conducting training for frontline health and waste management practitioners on safe handling of hazardous and infectious health care waste.

The Special Programme Secretariat is available to provide support on a case-by-case basis upon request from applicants during the preparation of their application. Applicants can seek specialist advice on identifying technical cooperation solutions, project design and sequencing of appropriate activities, measurement of effectiveness/impact and project management best practices. This advice can be provided directly by the Secretariat. The Secretariat can also seek to connect applicants with relevant experts from the relevant chemicals and waste related Conventions and SAICM 2020 and beyond, as appropriate.

More information available at <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste/what-we-do/special-programme/applying-funding-through-special>