



Persistent Organic Pollutants

WFPHA Resolution No. 96-2
adopted by WFPHA General Assembly
at 30th Annual Meeting 20 May 1996

The World Federation of Public Health Associations,

Noting that "virtually all chlorinated organic compounds that have been studied exhibit at least one of a wide range of serious toxic effects such as endocrine dysfunction, developmental impairment, birth defects, reproductive dysfunction and infertility, immunosuppression, and cancer, often at extremely low doses;"(1)

Remembering that in 1989 the United Nations General Assembly decided to organize a UN Conference on Environment and Development. One of the issues discussed at that conference was "environmentally sound management of wastes, particularly hazardous wastes, and of toxic chemicals." The UNCED, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro with participation by leaders of the UN member states, issued a declaration concerning the environment and passed Agenda 21, an action plan for all major areas affecting the relationship between the global environment and the economy;

Recalling that pursuant to the directions from Agenda 21, the United Nations Environmental Program Governing Council in May 1995 began a process of decision-making concerning persistent organic pollutants (POPs). POPs are xenobiotic chemicals that persist in the environment and maintain their toxic effects for years;

Noting that UNEP's Decision 18/32 invited the Inter-Organization Program for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), the International Program on Chemical Safety (IPCS), and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) to collaborate in an assessment and language developmental process on POPs. UNEP adopted the short list of POPs previously identified by the UN and the European Economic Commission's Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution process that included aldrin, dieldrin, endrin, chlordane, DDT, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex, toxaphene, PCBs, dioxins, and furans;

Aware that UNEP requested an intergovernmental and expert process to: a) consolidate existing information available on the chemistry and toxicology of the substances concerned; b) analyze the relevant transport pathways and the origin, transport, and deposition of these substances on a global scale; c) examine the sources, benefits, risks, and other considerations relevant to production and use; d) evaluate the availability, including costs and effectiveness, of preferable substitutes where applicable; and e) assess realistic response strategies, policies, and mechanisms for reducing and/or eliminating emissions, discharges, and losses of POPs;

Recognizing that scientific concern has recently been directed at the potential public health threat from a number of these POPs which likely have the potential to disrupt the human endocrine system. Among these, particular attention has been directed at the dibenzo dioxins and furans, as well as at other halogenated hydrocarbons (2);



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Understanding that: dioxins, furans, and other endocrine disrupting POPs are created by the production, use, and disposal of synthetic chlorinated organic compounds (3), specifically that they are produced and released into the environment during production and combustion of chlorinated plastic products (3,4);

Observing that chlorinated plastic products Ñ predominantly polyvinyl chloride (PVC) Ñ represent, on a tonnage basis, the largest and fastest growing class of synthetic chlorinated organic compounds, and that these are widely used in building products, automobiles, toys, and packaging (5);

Noting that in March 1996 the Inter-Sessional Group (ISG) of the IFCS met in Canberra, Australia with attendance by 35 countries and in attendance with voice but not vote by numerous international chemical manufacturers associations, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, and several other international professional associations. This group decided to establish the UNEP-convened Ad-Hoc Working Group on POPs as a formal working group of the IFCS and decided that "the available scientific evidence on tasks a and b of Decision 18/32 is sufficient to demonstrate the need for international action on the 12 specified substances;"

Aware that the ISG decided to convene an expert meeting 17-19 June 1996 in Manila, Philippines to address tasks c and d, to be immediately followed by an open meeting of the Working Group to assess the work on d,c, and e and develop recommendations and information on international action, including that needed for a possible decision regarding an appropriate legal mechanism on POPs;

Understanding that meetings of several international agencies and governments will occur in early 1997 to consider the work product of these meetings, with the target of action at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly five years after UNCED on 3-7 June 1997 in New York City, USA;

Appreciating the need for public health association involvement in this process, in that while much of the rationale for control and elimination of these substances is based on human health effects, no clear voice representing the public health community has been present at these meetings;

Noting that the addition of representation by WFPHA would provide input from a group with a history of public health advocacy, collective expertise, and prestige and that this contribution would be important to the global decision-making process in that it will entail the balancing of a variety of interests and effects. For example, the elimination of DDT from use in certain developing countries may have significant economic, acute toxic, and vector-control effects. WFPHA would have an important role in assessing how these effects are to be evaluated and balanced;

Aware that a significant global health education process will be necessary, based on whatever international instrument is adopted and that public health associations have a unique role to play in this process;

Realizing that public health input is welcomed by the representatives and individuals involved in this process;

1. DECIDES to become involved in this global effort to eliminate or reduce to the greatest extent possible the discharge of POPs into the environment;
2. RESOLVES to seek representation at meetings of appropriate persons who will take part in activities a, b, c, and d, and who will only observe activity e and report back to WFPHA for further guidance on this point.



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- (2) Webster T, Commoner B. Overview: the dioxin debate. Dioxins and Health. A. Schechter, ed. New York: Plenum Press; 1994; 1-50. Colborn T, Clement C, eds. Chemically Induced Alterations in Sexual and Functional Development: The Human-Wildlife Connection. Princeton: Princeton Scientific Publishers; 1993; 147-158. Male reproductive health and environmental estrogens, editorial, Lancet. 1995; 325:933-935. International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes, Sixth Biennial Report. 1994, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.
- (3) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development. Estimating Exposures to Dioxin-like Compounds, Volume I-III (Review draft). 1994, Washington: EPA/600/6-88-005. Thomas V, Spiro T. An estimation of dioxin emissions in the United States. Toxicological and Environmental Chemistry. 1995;50:1-37.
- (4) Wagner J, Green A. Correlation of chlorinated organic compound emissions from incineration with chlorinated organic input. Chemosphere 1993;26(11):2039-2054. Christmann W. Combustion of polyvinyl chloride -- an important source for the formation of PCDD/PCDP. Chemosphere 1989;19:387-392. Thiessen J. et al. Determination of PCDFs and PCDDs in fire accidents and laboratory combustion tests involving PVC-containing materials. Chemosphere 1989; 19:423-428.
- (5) Product Focus -- Polyvinyl Chloride. Chemical Week. 5 April 1995; 63.