

RESOLUTION

SAFER CHEMICAL POLICIES

Proposed by the Environmental Health Committee of the
World Federation of Public Health Associations

THE WORLD FEDERATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATIONS

Geneva, Switzerland

May 18, 2008

WHEREAS, The U.S. chemical industry designs, produces, and imports 42 billion pounds of chemical substances per day, with global production growing a projected 4-fold by 2050;^{1,2} and

WHEREAS, many of the substances useful to society are also hazardous to human and ecosystem health; Hazardous chemical exposure poses the greatest threat to children and to women before and throughout reproductive age, impacting children's health, development, behavior, and learning, with exposure to neurotoxic chemicals during critical child development periods linked to lifelong deficits in brain functions; and

WHEREAS, WFPHA has passed resolutions concerning Persistent Organic Pollutants in 1996; Promoting Health in an Era of Global Free Trade in 1998;) Health Care Without Harm in 1999; Support for International Action to Eliminate Persistent Organic Pollutants in 2001; Zero Waste in 2003; International Trade Agreements: Priorities for Health in 2003 and 2004; and a call for a Global Ban on the Mining and Use of Asbestos in 2005 all expressed concerns about aspects of chemicals and chemicals policies and their effects on human health; and

WHEREAS, many public health associations have been involved in the development of policies assuring safe handling of chemicals on national levels; and

WHEREAS, many national toxic control acts intended to prevent negative human health impacts of chemicals have, according to numerous independent analyses, fallen short of their objectives by failing to serve as a vehicle for effective public, industrial, and governmental *assessment* of the hazards of chemicals in commerce and *control* those of greatest health concern. Often even the most extensive laws fail in that they: do not require chemical producers to generate or disclose chemical hazard information on the more than 80,000 chemicals registered for use in commerce, nor the 2000 new chemicals introduced each year. They often require government to meet an excessively high standard of proof before acting to protect public or environmental health, primarily allowing protective action only after chemicals have caused harm; and it does not encourage prevention through the development and use of safer alternatives;⁴⁵ and

WHEREAS, in addition current market conditions fail to safeguard public health, creating problems including: the appearance of hundreds of industrial chemicals in human tissues and fluids, including the cord blood of infants;^{6,7} the development of chronic diseases and premature death related to chemical exposures in the workplace; and disproportionate risks due to chemical exposures among members of minority, immigrant, and low-income communities; and

WHEREAS, Sweeping changes in public and environmental health policy in the European Union are driving global interest in cleaner technologies, including safer chemicals; and

FINALLY WHEREAS,

on a global level fundamental changes are needed in the way that societies manage chemicals, Environment Ministers, Health Ministers and other delegates from over 100 governments together with representatives of civil society and the private sector declared in Dubai, February 6, 2006, that the environment worldwide continues to suffer from air, water and land contamination, impairing the health and welfare of millions. They adopted the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), a global plan of action whose stated goal is: to achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life-cycle so that, by 2020, chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, The WFPHA agrees with the SAICM:

- On the need to take action to “prevent the adverse effects of chemicals on the health of children, pregnant women, fertile populations, the elderly, the poor, workers and other vulnerable groups and susceptible environments.”
- On the need to “apply the precautionary approach” and “give priority consideration to the application of preventive measures such as pollution prevention.”
- On the need to address the “lack of capacity for managing chemicals in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, dependency on pesticides in agriculture, exposure of workers to harmful chemicals and concern about the long-term effects of chemicals on both human health and the environment.”
- With the commitment to “promote and support the development and implementation of, and further innovation in, environmentally sound and safer alternatives, including cleaner production, informed substitution of chemicals of particular concern and non-chemical alternatives.”
- On the need to promote “adequate transfer of cleaner and safer technology” and with a call to make available both “existing and new sources of financial support.”
- On the need to promote “capacity-building, education and training and information exchange on sound management of chemicals for all stakeholders.”
- That “the sound management of chemicals is essential if we are to achieve sustainable development, including the eradication of poverty and disease, the improvement of human health and the environment and the elevation and maintenance of the standard of living in countries at all levels of development.”

- With the commitment to “promote and support meaningful and active participation by all sectors of civil society, particularly women, workers and indigenous communities, in regulatory and other decision- making processes that relate to chemical safety.”
- With the commitment to facilitate access to “information and knowledge on chemicals throughout their life cycle, including the risks that they pose to human health and the environment.”

WFPHA supports international efforts for the safe and expedient destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles, with the burden shouldered by the creators of those stockpiles.

We commit ourselves and call upon all stakeholders including governments, non governmental organizations, the private sector, intergovernmental organizations and others to work together to implement SAICM policies, and to reform domestic chemicals assessment and management laws, policies and practices to achieve the 2020 goal in all countries

¹ American Chemistry Council. 2003. Guide to the Business of Chemistry, p 37. American Chemistry Council: Arlington, Virginia.

² Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 2001. Environmental Outlook for the Chemicals Industry, pp. 34-36 (<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/7/45/2375538.pdf>).

³ Goldman, L.R. and Koduru, S.H. 2000. Chemicals in the environment and developmental toxicity in children: A public health and policy perspective. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 108(3): S443-S448 (<http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/members/2003/6115/6115.html>).

⁴ Anastas P, Warner J. 1998. Green Chemistry: Theory and Practice. Oxford University Press: New York.

⁵ National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council, Board on Chemical Sciences and Technology. 2005. Sustainability in the Chemical Industry: Grand Challenges and Research Needs—A Workshop Report. National Academy Press: Washington, DC (<http://www.nap.edu/books/0309095719/html>).

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2005. The Third National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals (<http://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport/>).

⁷ Houlihan J et al. 2005. Body Burden: The Pollution in Newborns. Environmental Working Group: Washington, DC (<http://archive.ewg.org/reports/bodyburden2/execsumm.php>).