

# Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and other Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the context of the Basel Convention

Due to their chemical properties (toxic, bio-accumulative, persistent, long-range travelling) and wide-ranging awareness about their potential negative impact on people, and especially on women and children, PCBs have been of great concern to decision-makers in politics at the national and international levels for almost fifteen years.

PCBs fall under the scope of three of the most important international legally binding instruments on chemicals and wastes: the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

The eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention adopted the updated General Technical Guidelines on POPs as Waste as well as four other Technical Guidelines for particular waste streams related to POPs, including PCBs, polychlorinated terphenyls (PCTs), and polybrominated biphenyls (PBBs). These Guidelines were developed by the Basel Convention taking into consideration the need for the Stockholm Convention (under Article 6.2) to cooperate closely with the appropriate bodies of the Basel Convention so as to:

- determine what constitutes environmentally sound disposal methods,
  - establish the concentration levels of various chemicals in order to define the low persistent organic pollutant content according to the Convention.
- In the last ten years, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention has facilitated the implementation of several PCB related activities for Parties to the Convention from different regions, including national pilot inventories, regional programmes for the environmentally sound management of PCBs, and the preparation of guidance manuals as well as decision-making supportive tools (such as databases). Leveraged by the implementing process of the Stockholm Convention, these activities have become more progressive and dynamic. They complement and support the PCB-related activities undertaken by Parties in developing and implementing their National Implementation Plans (NIPs) under the Stockholm Convention.
- During the 2007-2008 biennium, the Basel Convention Regional Centre (BCRC) for French-speaking Countries in Africa (based in Dakar, Senegal) has successfully executed the first Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded medium-size project (1.3 Million USD), to be executed by a Basel Convention Regional Centre, entitled "Demonstration of a regional approach for the environmentally sound management of PCB liquid wastes, and transformers and capacitors containing PCBs".
- establish levels of destruction and irreversible transformation,



The complete project proposal, currently under preparation, has an estimated budget of 16 Million USD covering a period of four years. It aims at putting in place a regional facility for the decontamination of electrical equipment containing PCBs in West Africa and the export of liquid PCBs for

destruction in specialized facilities in Europe. With the active participation of the private sector and support from several development institutions, the project encourages the transfer and operation of environmentally sound technology to Africa in accordance with the standards for the environmentally sound management of POPs as waste, as developed by the Basel Convention. The initiative, which falls under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Environment Action Plan, will also assist in developing a long-term approach on the environmentally sound management of PCBs in the region in the context of the coordinated implementation of the Basel and the Stockholm Conventions.

A second project proposal (Medium-size project, 1.59 Million USD) on the environmentally sound management of PCBs, entitled 'Best Practices for PCB management of the mining sector of South America' for submission to the Global Environment Facility has been prepared by UNEP, UNEP-GEF Unit, the Basel Convention Regional Centre (BCRC) for the South American Region, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina and the Secretariat of the Basel Convention. The project's objectives are the development of partnerships with mining companies and industry associations for cost-effective environmentally sound management of PCBs and the identification of good practices and replicable elements on environmentally sound management of PCBs for the mining sector.

Collaborative efforts between UNEP, BCRCs and the Secretariat of the Basel Convention are due to continue and additional project proposals are currently being developed. In future, BCRCs will be expected to lead this process and to share experience in the execution of projects on the environmentally sound management of PCBs and POPs waste.

Those of the Basel Convention Regional and Coordinating Centres, which are to be selected to perform the functions of Stockholm Convention Regional Centres, would be expected to take a particularly important role in this matter.

In this context, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention would be in a position to shift its focus to the development of activities and specific tools for technology transfer, in line with Article 6.2 of the Stockholm Convention. With the objectives of the Bali Strategic Plan for Capacity Building and Technology Transfer in mind, and mindful of the pivotal role of the Basel Convention in developing the international normative framework for the environmentally sound management of POPs as waste that is also applicable to other related MEAs, the Secretariat of the Basel Convention has initiated programme activities on environmentally sound technologies and processes. A first guidance manual on environmentally sound technologies is being used by other international organizations, as in the context of the African Stockpile Project. In addition, a World Bank funded project will help the SBC develop guidance and training tools to enhance further the coordinated implementation of the Technical Guidelines for the ESM of POPs as Waste and the Stockholm Convention BAT/BEP Guidelines in 2008.



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