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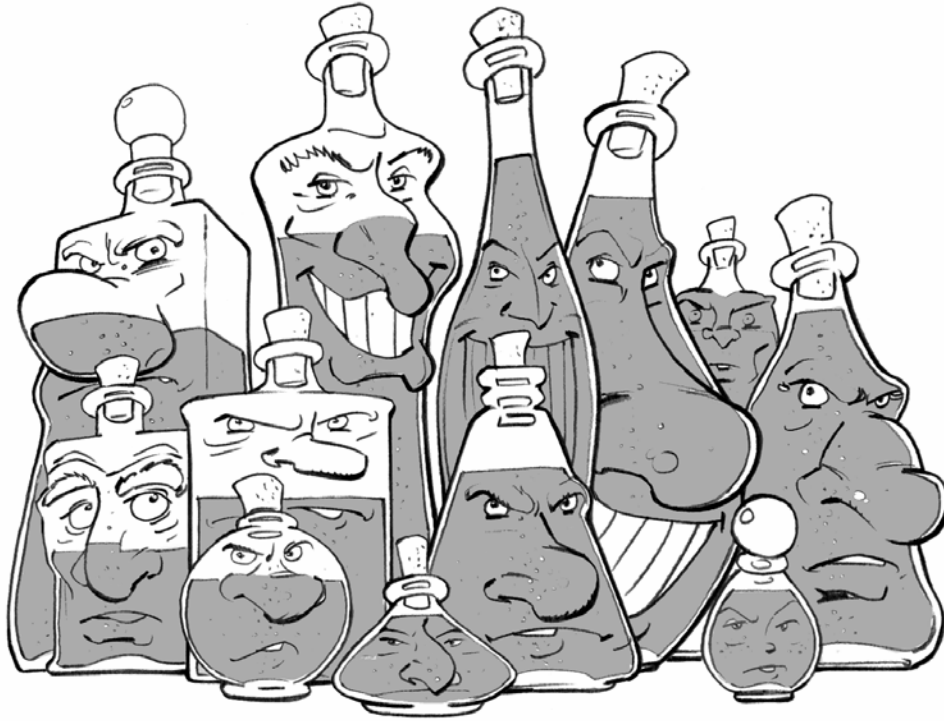
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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT • PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

PRESS INFORMATION KIT

POPS COP 1

**FIRST MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE STOCKHOLM
CONVENTION ON PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS**





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PRESS RELEASE

Governments meet to launch global campaign to eliminate 12 most hazardous chemicals

Punta del Este/Geneva, 26 April 2005 – The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) will make its debut on the world stage in Punta del Este, Uruguay from 2-6 May at a meeting of 800 government officials and observers committed to ridding the world of some of the most dangerous chemicals ever created.

The Convention, which entered into force on 17 May 2004, targets 12 hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals that can kill people, damage the nervous and immune systems, cause cancer and reproductive disorders and interfere with normal infant and child development.

“The Stockholm Convention will save lives and protect the natural environment – particularly in the poorest communities and countries,” said Executive Director Klaus Toepfer of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), under whose auspices the Convention was adopted in 2001.

“Eliminating POPs, however, will cost billions of dollars and require countries to adopt new methods and technologies to replace these toxic substances. The hard work has only just begun,” he said.

The main challenges to meeting the Convention’s goal are:

- **Minimizing and eliminating releases of dioxins and furans.** Reducing these unwanted by-products of combustion and industrial processes will require expensive and innovative new technologies and processes. It will also involve educating people not to burn garbage and other materials in open fires. In Punta del Este, officials aim to advance these efforts with Guidelines on Best Available Techniques and Environmental Practices for preventing or reducing the formation of dioxins and furans.
- **Phasing out DDT without undermining the fight against malaria.** Until safe, affordable and effective alternatives are in place, governments can continue using DDT to protect their citizens from malaria – a major killer in many tropical regions. The conference will evaluate the continued need for DDT and consider next steps.
- **Developing alternative for combating termites.** These tiny pests cause billions of dollars in economic damage and are particularly difficult to control. The meeting will consider procedures for handling future requests by governments for exemptions enabling them to continue using three POPs termiticides. It will also

evaluate initiatives to reduce and eliminate completely the need for these chemicals.

- **Cleaning up old PCBs from aging and widely dispersed equipment.** PCBs have been used in electrical transformers and other equipment for decades. They must be eliminated and replaced over the next 20 years. Most developing countries, however, currently lack the facilities, funds and expertise to do so.

Fortunately, these challenges (which are described in greater detail in the articles below) can all be met through win-win solutions that reconcile eventual elimination with immediate human needs. By signalling to governments and industry that certain chemicals have no future while respecting their legitimate short-term concerns, the Convention aims to stimulate the development of new, affordable and effective alternatives to the world's most dangerous POPs.

The 12 POPs covered by the Convention include nine pesticides (aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex and toxaphene); two industrial chemicals (PCBs as well as hexachlorobenzene, also used as a pesticide); and unintentional by-products, most importantly dioxins and furans. One of the conference's key tasks is to establish a process for evaluating future candidates for adding to this initial list.

The conference will also consider adopting or endorsing the guidelines on managing POPs wastes that were adopted last year by the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movements of Hazardous and Other Wastes. Still another task is to provide guidance to the Global Environment Facility, which serves for the time being as the "financial mechanism" that funds national projects and activities for implementing the Convention.

Some 130 countries are expected to participate in the Punta del Este meeting, which is known formally as the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP 1).

While the risk level varies from POP to POP, these chemicals all share four properties: they are highly toxic; they are stable and persistent, lasting for years or decades before degrading into less dangerous forms; they evaporate and travel long distances through the air and through water; and they accumulate in the fatty tissue of humans and wildlife.

Every human in the world carries traces of POPs in his or her body. POPs circulate globally through a process known as the "grasshopper effect". POPs released in one part of the world can, through a repeated process of evaporation and deposit, be transported through the atmosphere to regions far away from the original source.

Fortunately, there are alternatives to POPs. The problem has been that high costs, a lack of public awareness, and the absence of appropriate infrastructure and technology have often prevented their adoption. Solutions must be tailored to the specific properties and uses of each chemical and to each country's climatic and socio-economic conditions.

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PRESS BACKGROUNDER

New data and techniques set stage for bigger cuts in dioxins and furans

Punta del Este/Geneva, 26 April 2005 – A set of ambitious international guidelines for dramatically reducing dioxins and furans – carcinogenic chemicals present at levels that put human health and wildlife at serious risk – will get a major boost at an upcoming conference on the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

Unlike the other 10 POPs covered by the Convention, dioxins (or PCDDs) and furans (PCDFs) are unwanted by-products with no commercial value. They result from incomplete combustion in incinerators; the burning of garbage, wood and other biomass; and other industrial processes.

The Convention recognizes that current technologies make it extremely difficult to approach zero releases of these chemicals. Already, billions of dollars have been spent on research, retrofits of incinerators and cleaner technologies. Billions more will be spent in the decades to come.

To assist government in achieving real reductions in releases, officials meeting from 2-6 May in Uruguay aim to release guidelines on Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practices (BAT and BEP). They will also assess the national inventories of dioxin and furan sources that governments are in the process of completing.

“For the first time, governments are systematically identifying their major sources of dioxins and furans and will now be able to prioritize their actions. Together with the new guidelines on best available techniques and best environmental practices, this will allow them to make major inroads into what has long been a stubborn problem for health and environment,” said UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer.

Developed by an international group of experts, the draft guidelines recommend a range of principles, approaches and techniques, many of which are already being used to promote pollution prevention and cleaner technology. They include, for example, the adoption of alternative processes and materials, improved methods for flue-gas cleaning, better treatment of wastes and sewage sludge, process changes (such as moving to closed systems) and increased combustion efficiency.

About two dozen of the national inventories have already been completed using the UNEP Chemicals Dioxin Furan Toolkit. They reveal that dioxin and furan sources in developing countries include the uncontrolled burning of garbage and other materials, and tend not to be dominated by the high-tech industrial sources typical of developed countries.

For example, almost one third of Cuba's releases come from biomass-fired power plants, while 77% of Jordan's releases derive from burning in landfills. The policy priorities for these two countries are therefore clear. Other important sources described in the inventories include hospital wastes incineration, open burning of municipal wastes, forest fires and agricultural residue burning.

While most of the POPs targeted by the Convention are to be phased out rapidly or immediately, the production of unwanted by-products cannot simply be banned. The Convention therefore calls for steps to reduce the release of dioxins and furans with the aim of their "continuing minimization and, where feasible, ultimate elimination". It also requires governments to develop action plans and inventories within two years of the Convention's entry into force and to promote the use of best available techniques and best environmental practices.

Dioxins and furans weaken the human immune system, cause neurological and reproductive disorders and disrupt hormones. One of the dioxins (2,3,7,8-TCDD) is classified as a human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and is considered to be the most toxic synthetic chemical in existence.

Human exposures to dioxins and furans recorded in industrialized countries are disturbingly high: according to the European Union, its citizens are consuming 60 to 130% of the tolerable monthly intake recommended by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Most human exposure occurs through eating fatty foods, particularly meat, fish and dairy products. Inhaling fumes from the open burning of harvest residues, garbage and other biomass also contributes, although to a much lesser extent.

In recent years, a series of dangerous incidents have alerted policymakers and the general public alike to the risks. These incidents have included the 1998 meat poisoning in Europe that resulted from contaminated Brazilian citrus pellets fed to cattle; the 1999 Belgian crisis involving chickens fattened on feed contaminated with PCBs and furans, with total damages estimated at \$4 billion; the 1999 "Brandenburg case" where elevated dioxin levels were found in eggs in Germany due to the use of contaminated fuels in drying green fodder; and the detection in Europe in recent months of high dioxin levels in free-range chicken eggs.



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PRESS BACKGROUNDER

Health experts and environmentalists combine forces to reduce DDT while preventing malaria

Punta del Este/Geneva, 26 April 2005 – Health experts stress that DDT is vital for killing and repelling malarial mosquitoes. The malaria parasite kills at least one million people a year, mostly children, and mainly in Africa – and it increasingly resists the drugs traditionally used for treatment.

Environmentalists point out that DDT harms wildlife, killing birds, for example, by thinning their eggs shells. This means that DDT, like other persistent organic pollutants (POPs), could also be causing chronic health problems in humans. Its widespread presence in breast milk, in particular, may be harming infants.

This dilemma will be addressed during the first week of May in Punta del Este, Uruguay when the member states of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) evaluate the need for the continued use of DDT – which, together with 11 other POPs, is targeted for eventual elimination by the treaty.

Fortunately, the health and environment communities both agree that, while DDT will remain necessary for some time in some countries, it will be possible to gradually reduce its use by adopting more environmentally-friendly alternatives. Most of these alternatives can be as effective – or, given malaria's still-high death toll – more effective in reducing, and one day eliminating, malaria.

"Adopting newly available approaches to malaria control can reduce the amount of DDT used every year without risking human lives," said UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer. "However, unless more ambitious investments are made in finding better vaccines against the malaria parasite and better pesticides and methods to fight the mosquitoes that carry it, the complete elimination of DDT will not occur for many years."

Every year, some 7,500 tonnes of DDT are sprayed in small quantities on the interior walls of homes as a relatively cheap and effective way of repelling and killing malarial mosquitoes, thus preventing them from biting people. Hardly any country sprays DDT on crops anymore – hundreds of thousands of tonnes annually were once used in agriculture – but over 20 still use it for malaria control.

These nations are justifiably concerned that an over-quick banning of DDT could have a high price in human lives lost to malaria. The Convention therefore permits the production and use of DDT for controlling mosquitoes and other disease vectors in accordance with World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations and guidelines and when locally safe, effective, and affordable alternatives are not available. Use will be carefully regulated and monitored and must be publicly registered.

The Convention's members states will, in consultation with WHO, evaluate at least every three years whether DDT is still needed for this purpose. Thus protection against malaria will not diminish – very important – and the use of DDT will probably become more safe and efficient as a natural response to increased scrutiny.

Moreover, researchers and environmental and health organizations will have a greater incentive to develop more alternative strategies for malaria control, hastening the day when DDT will no longer be such an essential part of the anti-malaria toolkit.

DDT is still used because it works and it is cheap. Because DDT is sprayed in relatively small amounts, mosquitoes have not started to develop resistance to it as they have with other non-POPs pesticides that are also used in agriculture, and are therefore more widespread in the environment.

But many countries that confront malaria have moved or are moving away from DDT. They are drawing on a set of integrated environmental and disease-management strategies. The reason is that DDT represents an old technology in the fight against malaria, effective in some instances, but not in others. Its use may also pose long-term health risks to the people it is meant to help.

In seeking alternative strategies, many countries have turned to Integrated Vector Management (IVM), which involves using a combination of techniques adapted to local circumstances. One is to choose from a list of 11 insecticides (DDT is the 12th) currently recommended by the WHO for indoor spraying. Others include using larvicides to kill mosquitos before they mature and cleaning up puddles and old tyres and other insect breeding grounds.

Yet another IVM intervention involves the use of Insecticide Treated Nets (ITNs). These bed nets have proven themselves to be effective, especially since people receive most mosquito bites while they are sleeping. Long Lasting Insecticidal Nets containing an insecticide within the netting fibre, which allows the net to remain effective for four or five years, have also recently been introduced.



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PRESS BACKGROUNDER

A race for solutions to world's multi-billion-dollar termite problem as clock runs out on key pesticides

Punta del Este/Geneva, 26 April 2005 – For decades, people have relied on powerful pesticides to prevent termites from devouring buildings, damaging infrastructure and ruining crops.

But some of these pesticides are known to be persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and they are now targeted for elimination under the Stockholm Convention on POPs. The Convention gives governments a five-year deadline to outlaw three of the most effective termiticides ever developed.

Measuring anywhere from four to 15 mm in length, termites live in colonies that consume vast quantities of wood and plants. And termites are, simply put, hard to kill or shoo away.

Negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Stockholm Convention seeks to eliminate 12 particularly dangerous POPs. However, it allows governments to request five-year exemptions to continue using three highly effective pesticides – chlordane, heptachlor and mirex – for controlling termites.

Some 14 governments have already sought exemptions in order to use specific POPs for termite control, wood and plywood treatments, intermediates in chemicals production or for other purposes. The Punta del Este meeting will determine the process for reviewing requests for extending the exemptions already granted and will evaluate the progress being made to reduce and eliminate the POPs pesticides used for termite control.

"The very qualities that make POPs so dangerous to human health and the environment – their persistence and their toxicity – are what have made them so popular for fighting termites," said Vernard Lewis, Chairman of the UNEP/FAO Global Termite Expert Group, which was established in 2002 to assist governments phase out the POPs used as termiticides.

"Now we need to replace this 'sledgehammer approach' with more sophisticated management methods and less harmful chemicals. Fortunately, these alternatives are available and, with an extra effort, we can steadily reduce and eventually eliminate the use of POPs for termite control," he said.

The exemptions to the termiticide phase-outs will expire in May 2009, five years after the Convention entered into force. A report must be submitted by a Party to the Convention to justify any request to renew an exemption, and the Parties to the Convention may turn it down. Once there are no remaining countries registered for a particular type of exemption, this exemption will be closed to any future requests.

To minimize the demand for exemptions, a \$1.225 million international project funded by UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Global Environment Facility has been launched in six countries.

The 18-month project will enable Chile, Jamaica, Morocco, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Zambia to evaluate their termite problems, select alternative management options and test and demonstrate their effectiveness and practicality. It will also assist countries to strengthen institutional and human resource capacities; provide logistical, scientific and technical support; and promote an enabling policy and regulatory environment.

Meanwhile, new kinds of termite problems are now emerging. Expanding trade flows are increasing the number of termites that hitchhike rides on exported wood, arriving in new locales as invasive alien species that dominate new niches free of natural predators. Similarly, the trend towards growing cash crops that originate from other continents is exposing these "exotics" to termite risks that they have not evolved to protect themselves against.

Termites are a part of the natural ecosystem in much of the world, and their presence is not, by itself, evidence of a termite pest problem. More than 2,600 different species are now recognized, of which fewer than 185 are considered pests. Termites' greatest ecological contribution is recycling woody and other plant material and aerating soils, which can improve the composition and fertility of soil as well as its ability to absorb water.

Termites become pests when their eating or tunneling damages buildings, bridges, dams, roads, utility poles, underground cables and pipes, crops, forest trees or rangelands. In addition to eating structural timber they have an appetite for household furniture, paper products, many synthetic materials and food items.

Global estimates suggest that the damage wrought by termites amounts to over \$30 billion a year. In the US alone, expenditures on damage, repair and prevention are estimated to total some US\$ 2-3 billion dollars a year. In addition to these economic damages, termites also cause cultural losses when they harm old churches and other historic buildings.

Fortunately, buildings can be designed in ways to minimize the risks of termite infestations. The most cost-effective approach is to install termite management systems at the time of construction and then to inspect for termite activity on a regular basis. Successful termite management is a process that includes the talents of construction, pest-management and building-management professionals.

Strategies for designing a building to withstand termites include physical or chemical barriers or combinations thereof, the use of resistant materials for all structural elements and a design that allows for ease of inspection (for example removable skirting boards and adequate crawl space).



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PRESS BACKGROUNDER

Governments seek private-sector partners for global clean-up of toxic PCBs

Punta del Este/Geneva, 26 April 2005 – PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, have kept the world's electricity networks humming along nicely for decades. They are also classified as probable human carcinogens and have been found to cause reproductive and immune defects in wildlife.

With their dangers now understood, PCBs are being targeted for worldwide elimination by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The problem is that equipment containing PCBs is dispersed widely, notably along electric power-line grids.

Another problem is that transporting and then safely storing or destroying PCBs requires special measures and high-tech facilities. Many developing countries lack such facilities and can only export limited amounts of PCBs at a time for treatment. Meanwhile, aging equipment reaching the end of its useful life needs to be managed to avoid leaks and accidents.

Recognizing that cleaning up PCBs and replacing them with safer alternatives will take time, money and know-how, the Stockholm Convention gives governments until 2025 to phase out in-place equipment such as electrical transformers and capacitors containing PCBs, as long as the equipment is maintained in a way that prevents leaks. The recovered PCBs must be safely stored or destroyed "as quickly as possible", but no later than 2028.

Meeting from 2 – 6 May for the first time since the Convention's entry into force a year ago, governments will provide guidance on their priorities to the Global Environment Facility, which will channel much of the money needed for phasing out the 12 POPs now covered by the Convention. The sums needed for the PCBs clean-up are estimated to run at least into the hundreds of millions of dollars. But money alone is not enough – facilities and know-how are critical for meeting the 2025 and 2028 deadlines.

"The financial and technical challenges of eliminating PCBs from the planet will require a vigorous partnership between the public and private sectors," said John Buccini, acting Executive Secretary of the Stockholm Convention.

"While international donors and national governments will set priorities and invest most of the money, commercial firms will provide much of the expertise and technology to perform the actual clean-up work," he said.

PCBs are generally destroyed in special incinerators operating at extraordinarily high temperatures. These incinerators must be of the highest standard to avoid releasing dioxins and furans – chemicals that are even more toxic than PCBs and are also targeted by the Convention – into the atmosphere. PCBs are also stored in chemical waste landfills or broken down via various new technologies.

Tonnes of wastes containing or contaminated by PCBs are also being held at temporary storage sites, particularly in developing countries. In addition, large quantities of PCBs have been discharged into soils, rivers and lakes over the years. Further releases continue to result due to transformer fires and other accidents, the repair and decommissioning of equipment, the demolition of buildings and the continued existence of imperfectly sealed landfills and waste drums.

PCBs are a group of 209 substances whose chemical stability and resistance to heat made them attractive as coolants, insulating materials, lubricants for electrical transformers and capacitors, and other purposes. Up to two million tonnes of PCBs have been commercially manufactured since 1929. Annual world production peaked in the late 1960s at close to 60,000 tonnes.

Though now virtually out of production, PCBs were widely used and exported until the 1970s and 1980s, when many developed countries banned their use and started to invest large sums in replacing or retrofitting old electrical equipment and cleaning up dump sites.

Like other POPs, PCBs remain in the environment for many years, often travelling thousands of kilometres from where they were first released. They “bio-accumulate” through the food chain (though insoluble in water, PCBs are readily absorbed by fatty tissue and reach their highest concentrations in carnivorous fish, birds, mammals – and people).

People are mainly exposed to PCBs via fatty foods (notably fish and, for infants, breast milk). A number of tragedies and scandals in recent years have involved the accidental mixing of PCB-containing oils with vegetable oils destined as animal feed. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that such toxic oils may be used as cooking oil, fuel and as lubricants in the informal sector of some countries

Additional exposures occur through skin contact or breathing. In addition to causing cancer, the actual and potential health effects of PCB exposure include interference with reproduction and development, impaired immune function, and damage to the central nervous system and the liver. Even trace amounts can have identifiable consequences, and those at highest risk are children.

PCBs are also toxic to fish, killing them at higher doses and causing spawning failures at lower doses. Research also links PCBs to reproductive failure and suppression of the immune system in various wild animals, such as seals and mink.



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PRESS BACKGROUNDER

The first 12 POPs

Aldrin – A pesticide applied to soils to kill termites, grasshoppers, corn rootworm, and other insect pests.

Chlordane – Used extensively to control termites and as a broad-spectrum insecticide on a range of agricultural crops.

DDT – Perhaps the best known of the POPs, DDT was widely used during World War II to protect soldiers and civilians from malaria, typhus, and other diseases spread by insects. It continues to be applied against mosquitoes in several countries to control malaria.

Dieldrin – Used principally to control termites and textile pests, dieldrin has also been used to control insect-borne diseases and insects living in agricultural soils.

Dioxins – These chemicals are produced unintentionally due to incomplete combustion, as well as during the manufacture of certain pesticides and other chemicals. In addition, certain kinds of metal recycling and pulp and paper bleaching can release dioxins. Dioxins have also been found in automobile exhaust, tobacco smoke and wood and coal smoke.

Endrin – This insecticide is sprayed on the leaves of crops such as cotton and grains. It is also used to control mice, voles and other rodents.

Furans – These compounds are produced unintentionally from the same processes that release dioxins, and they are also found in commercial mixtures of PCBs.

Heptachlor – Primarily employed to kill soil insects and termites, heptachlor has also been used more widely to kill cotton insects, grasshoppers, other crop pests, and malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

Hexachlorobenzene (HCB) – HCB kills fungi that affect food crops. It is also released as a byproduct during the manufacture of certain chemicals and as a result of the processes that give rise to dioxins and furans. Its use as a solvent and industrial intermediary is not targeted by the Convention.

Mirex – This insecticide is applied mainly to combat fire ants and other types of ants and termites. It has also been used as a fire retardant in plastics, rubber, and electrical goods.

Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) – These compounds are employed in industry as heat exchange fluids, in electric transformers and capacitors, and as additives in paint, carbonless copy paper, sealants and plastics.

Toxaphene – This insecticide, also called camphechlor, is applied to cotton, cereal grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables. It has also been used to control ticks and mites in livestock.
