



# United Nations Environment Programme

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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 RELEASE

### **Governments take decisive action to rid the world of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) through the Stockholm Convention**

#### **Four new chemicals proposed for phase-out**

Punta del Este, Uruguay, 6 May 2005 – Several decades after scientists first confirmed that certain toxic chemicals travel around the world after their release into the environment, eventually drifting northward to poison the traditional foods of Arctic peoples, an intergovernmental conference here has ensured that global efforts to reduce and eliminate a list of highly hazardous chemicals will now move forward energetically.

“This week’s conference on the Stockholm Convention on POPs has provided an inspiring example of how countries can work together through the United Nations to find global solutions to global problems,” said Executive Director Klaus Toepfer of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

“Committed advocates from the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) and other nongovernmental groups have played a central role in focusing the attention of governments and the general public on the need to tackle POPs. Governments must do their part too by quickly reducing the risks to the environment and human health from long-lasting toxic chemicals and pesticides, not only for the Inuit but for every person on Earth,” he said.

The conference established a POPs Review Committee that will be responsible for evaluating additional chemicals that could be added to the initial list of 12 POPs. The Committee will hold its first meeting in Geneva later this year. Its recommendations will be forwarded to future annual meetings of the Conference of the Parties for decisions on whether and how new POPs should be added to the Convention.

The Committee will start its work with four candidates that have been proposed before or during this week’s conference. Norway has nominated the flame retardant pentabromodiphenyl ether. Mexico has nominated a group of chemicals known as hexachlorocyclohexanes, which include the pesticide lindane. The European Union proposes listing the pesticide chlordecone and the flame retardant hexabromobiphenyl.

One of the chemicals already targeted by the Convention is DDT. The meeting recognized, however, that some 25 countries will need to continue spraying controlled amounts of DDT on the inside walls of houses to combat malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The progress being made on developing safe, affordable and locally effective alternatives to DDT will be reviewed again in three years. Delegates agreed on the rules and documentation for collecting the information needed for conducting such reviews.

"The environmental community is collaborating with the World Health Organization to ensure that the phase-out of the remaining uses of DDT does not undermine the battle against malaria and the well-being of people living in malarial zones," said Mr. Toepfer.

Noting the strong synergies that exist between the POPs treaty and the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movements of Hazardous and Other Wastes, the meeting lent its support to the guidelines for managing POPs wastes that the Basel Convention adopted last year and encouraged countries to apply them.

The meeting further agreed on how to evaluate the Convention's progress in reducing the levels of POPs in the environment. It established a system for requesting and registering temporary exemptions to the phase-out of certain chemicals. The meeting welcomed and accepted the invitation of Switzerland to locate the Convention's secretariat in Geneva.

This week's POPs conference was immediately preceded here by the Latin America regional meeting on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. SAICM represents a comprehensive effort to improve the way the world deals with chemicals. Following a final preparatory meeting in Vienna from 19-24 September, SAICM is expected to be finalized next February in Dubai during the 9<sup>th</sup> Special Session of UNEP Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

The 12 initial POPs covered by the Stockholm 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.

These chemicals can kill people, damage the nervous and immune systems, cause cancer and reproductive disorders and interfere with normal infant and child development. While the risk level varies from POP to POP, they 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.

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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