Criteria for substances of international concern – a workshop to support the intersessional process for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020

Background

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is a policy framework to promote chemical safety around the world. It was adopted by the First International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM1) on 6 February 2006 in Dubai. SAICM supports the achievement of the goal agreed at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development of “ensuring that, by the year 2020, chemicals will be produced and used in ways that minimize significant adverse impacts on the environment and human health”. ICCM4 (2015) initiated an intersessional process to prepare recommendations regarding the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. Within this process, development of strategic objectives and targets is ongoing. One of the objectives being considered is Objective C: Issues of concern that warrant global action are identified, prioritized and addressed ¹.

A procedure to manage issues of international concern that warrant concerted action is discussed as part of the governance structure of the beyond 2020 framework. The intersessional process should therefore establish a process for developing time-bound programmes of work and commitments with specified actions from countries and other stakeholders. With such a procedure, countries and other stakeholders could make time-bound commitments on defined measures on issues of concern within an appropriate context or at national level. There may be a need for such procedures to include internationally-established criteria.

One issue of concern is hazardous substances or groups of substances with transboundary movement that are not covered by other international agreements such as the Stockholm and Minamata conventions and the Montreal protocol. The current SAICM emerging policy issues concern broad policy areas in general, and are not necessarily restricted to substances. The criteria are also focused on providing information on an issue, but do not focus on what criteria should be used to decide if

¹ The wording of the objective contains brackets and is still open for further deliberation; the above phrasing is only used as guidance
an issue is of international concern or not, and therefore would need to be further developed.

The workshop

To inform and contribute to the intersessional process considering the Strategic Approach and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, the Swedish Chemicals Agency (Kemi), in cooperation with Centre for Future Chemical Risk Assessment and Management Strategies, University of Gothenburg (FRAM) and UNITAR, is therefore hosting a technical workshop on criteria for identification of substances of international concern.

The purpose of the workshop is to present and discuss criteria suggested in a study commissioned by Kemi and conducted by Professor Thomas Backhaus, University of Gothenburg and Professor Martin Scheringer, ETH Zürich. A draft version of the study will be available to workshop participants. The final study and the outcomes of the technical expert workshop will serve as an input to the discussions as part of the intersessional process considering SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, with its fourth meeting planned to be held from 23-27 March 2020 in Bucharest, Romania.

The workshop will be technical in nature and is limited to a small group of 50 experts to enable effective discussion. The aim is to have broad representation from all United Nations regions as well as multiple disciplines and sectors. Limited funding will be available for those experts selected from developing countries, countries with economies in transition, and non-governmental participants. The study, logistics and other information will be provided as soon as available to the selected experts.