



a toxics-free future

[www.ipen.org](http://www.ipen.org)

[ipen@ipen.org](mailto:ipen@ipen.org)

## International SAICM Implementation Project (ISIP)

In 2010, in an effort to demonstrate SAICM implementation via IPEN Participating Organizations, IPEN launched an International SAICM Implementation Project, also known as ISIP. ISIP aims to mobilize resources for initial enabling activities pertaining to national priorities, in keeping with the work areas set out in the strategic objectives of section IV of the SAICM Overarching Policy Strategy.

In particular, the ISIP supports the Governance objective of SAICM's Overarching Policy Strategy paragraph 26, which calls for enhanced "cooperation on the sound management of chemicals between Governments, the private sector and civil society at the national, regional and global levels."

In addition, ISIP builds on the 2008-2009 Global SAICM Outreach Campaign to raise awareness about SAICM and strengthen collaboration among the public interest, health and labor sectors.

### ISIP Objectives

ISIP's four objectives include:

- Promoting the need for sound chemicals management
- Advancing National SAICM Implementation
- Promoting global SAICM implementation by global civil society
- Building capacity among NGOs developing countries and countries with economies in transition

**Title of activity:** How safe are our food products?

**NGO:** EDEN Center

**Country:** Macedonia

**Date:** December 2009

### Elements of SAICM Covered:

Participation in the collection, review, and assessment of existing information on information systems pertaining to chemicals in products including but not limited to regulations, standards and industry practices; Develop specific recommendations for actions to promote implementation of the Strategic Approach with regard to such information, incorporating identified priorities and access and delivery mechanisms; and follow up activities for the SAICM OEWG and ICMM3; Promote the use of safe and effective alternatives, including non-chemical alternatives to organic chemicals that are highly toxic, persistent and bioaccumulative; Promote the development and use of products and processes that pose lesser risks; Articles and products containing hazardous substances should all be accompanied by relevant information for users, workplaces and at disposal sites; Promote provision of information for all chemicals in commerce, including appropriate information detailing their inherent hazards should be made available to the public at no charge and generated where needed with essential health, safety and environmental information made available (ICCM2 decision II/4, GPA items 54, 44, 108,111)

**Description of the specific product(s) and chemical(s) related to the activity:** *Sodium nitrite*, with chemical formula  $\text{NaNO}_2$ , is used as a color fixative and preservative in meats and fish. When pure, it is a white to slight yellowish crystalline powder. It is very soluble in water and is hygroscopic. It is also slowly

oxidized by oxygen in the air to sodium nitrate,  $\text{NaNO}_3$ . The compound is a strong oxidizing agent. We can find Sodium Nitrate & Nitrite in *Bacon, ham, frankfurters, luncheon meats, smoked fish, and corned beef*. Sodium nitrate is used in dry cured meat, because it slowly breaks down into nitrite. Adding nitrite to food can lead to the formation of small amounts of potent cancer-causing chemicals (nitrosamines), particularly in fried bacon.

**Potassium Bromate**, this additive has long been used to increase the volume of bread and to produce bread with a fine crumb (the not-crust part of bread) structure. Most bromates rapidly break down to form innocuous bromide. *Potassium Bromate* is a flour improver and we can find it in *white flour, bread and rolls*. In 1999, the Center for Science in the Public Interest petitioned the FDA to ban bromate.

**Artificial Coloring, (blue 2, green 3, orange B, red 3, yellow 5, yellow 6)** most artificial colorings are synthetic chemicals that do not occur in nature. Colorings are used almost solely in foods of low nutritional value. In addition to the problems mentioned below, colorings cause hyperactivity in some sensitive children. Some colorings can cause brain cancer (Blue 2). We can find artificial colorings in: *candy, baked goods, gelatin desserts, pet food, beverages, and sausage*.

#### **Description of the toxic effects of the chemicals contained in the product(s):**

- Sodium nitrite reacts with stomach acid and other chemicals in the stomach to produce nitrosamines, which have been shown to cause cancer in animals when consumed in large quantities.

-Potassium bromate itself causes cancer in animals. The tiny amounts of bromate that may remain in bread pose a small risk to consumers.

-Artificial Colorings cause hyperactivity in some sensitive children and can cause brain cancer.

#### **Description of how consumers are exposed to these toxic chemicals:**

These chemicals are found in food products that are consumed frequently by Albanian consumers. The permanent consumption and without limit of these products have higher volatility. As found by the assessment in many markets in Tirana and Durrësi (the two biggest cities of Albania accommodating almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the Albanian population), there are quite a number of products that have labels indicating the presence of these toxic chemicals. However, many of the products only have labeling in a foreign language, which is a problem for consumers and potentially explains the lack of information they have in regard to what they consume and what effects these products might have in their body.

For the products that are in the open market the situation could be even worse because the control and the need for quality of services there is less evident.

If we consider the fact that out of 200 respondents only 54% of those are clients of the regular markets, the direct deduction is that the number of Albanian consumers faced daily with products containing uncontrolled products (which in a lot of cases do contain toxics) is quite large.

A further, detailed assessment of cleaning, personal care and electronic goods could lead to a better understanding of the risk in a global picture.

#### **Description of how the product waste that contains the hazardous chemical(s) is handled:**

No information is available for this; nonetheless it should be stated that the level of waste management in Albania is in a very primitive stage. There is only one landfill operating in the country and it is still not fulfilling the EU landfill directive standards, while the whole country operates based on the dump sites. There is not yet a specific site dealing with hazardous chemicals. The new national waste management strategy is setting the basis for this.

#### **Description of what information (or level of information) is available to consumers about the toxic chemicals in the product:**

Markets in Albania have a wide variety of food products imported to the country. Most of the products that are imported are not labeled according to standards required in the Albanian language. This is the first obstacle for the consumers to have info on specific ingredients of the products.

On the other hand, our assessment and opinion is largely based on what we have found in the labeling of the products. If specific analysis would be done (on a random basis) to products such as *bacon, ham, frankfurters, luncheon meats, white flour, candies, etc.*, the situation could be much worse.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through the National Food Authority, does not have any public outreach plan in order to inform the public about the existence of the chemicals in the food products and their effects. The resources from their side are scarce and can not even cover the proper monitoring of the minimum requirements such as presence of detailed labeling, labeling of products in Albanian, etc.

### **Description of what types of similar products are available on the market, including safer alternatives:**

For us it is difficult to give specific alternative products in the market, because we cannot say for sure that those alternatives are also free of chemicals and properly controlled. Nevertheless, some can be counted: Consumers could replace, for example, white bread with the traditional “black” bread; Fresh fish instead of smoked fish (luckily in Albania we do have several fresh fish markets); Fresh beef and other types of meat instead of the corned, smoked or other pre-treated meats; and As for the different types of juice and beverages there is not too much choice but the fresh made ones.

### **Project Outcomes:**

#### **Description of the activity conducted:**

At the beginning of the project (April), we did research on hazardous chemicals that might exist in food products. After a consultation with experts of the field and the program coordinator (Jan), it was decided to do the assessment based on 4 chemicals in food products that are more regularly consumed by consumers. An early communication and a working partnership has been established with the consumer protection office in Albania (<http://www.konsumatori.org>), which was a great support in institutionalizing the project and reaching the National Food Authority.

A dedicated meeting with the National Food Authority was done in the early stages of the project in order to present the project and also ask for institutional support on it. The feedback given by NFA was very positive and the representatives of NFA promised to make specific investigations on the products identified by our assessment as “risky ones.” They also committed to make laboratory tests.

Two types of questionnaires were prepared. One questionnaire was targeting the consumers and the other one targeting the products in the markets. EDEN volunteers that were engaged in doing the assessment were initially trained on how to fill the questionnaires and the code of conduct. Once the questionnaires were finished, a statistical elaboration of those questionnaires was done and concrete results were concluded.

Another joint meeting with National Food Authority and the Office of Consumer Protection was organized upon the finalization of the assessment. At this meeting the EDEN coordinator made a presentation of the project progress and results as well as asked them to officially come up with an action plan in addressing at least the further investigation in the markets and the enforcement of labeling law in place. We specifically asked NFA to initiate the necessary tests for food products that are deemed to have chemicals in order to identify the amount and risk to human organisms.

As civil society we asked that any product which is in Albanian markets should be labeled like in European Union standards, listing components contained in the product. In cases where products have a chemical in their composition it should be required to write the side effects. We have asked for help in raising awareness of consumers by giving them as much information on various chemicals in food products as they could.

NFA, after the meeting with EDEN Center in May – June, has made an investigation into the closed markets and according to them the list of food ingredients (submitted to them) are in line with the standards

of European Union and they don't have a high risk for negative effects in the human body. Nevertheless they did acknowledge the lack of proper and expertise control and promised to follow up on this.

Currently they are working to create a section just for random analysis involving different laboratories. A dedicated analysis of local products will be made as well.

As a response to our approach they did a check of the markets in Durres in regards to the security of food (<http://www.lajme.gen.al/2010-07-13/inspektoret-e-ushqimit-te-aku-nisin-kontrollin-e-sigurise-ushqimore-ne-durres.html>).

NFA is working to label products according to standards and have them available in the Albanian language. They promised that soon on the website of the NFA there will be information published on chemicals that exist in food products (<http://www.mbumk.gov.al/>).

We have to state here the National Food Authority is a very recent governmental institution (it has been set up only in May 2010) and their openness and positive cooperation approach is distinctive.

In September a leaflet containing information about various chemicals, especially with those we found in food products, was prepared, publicized and distributed.

Several media programs and press releases were organized in cooperation with the Office for Consumers Protection.

### **Impact on target groups:**

The National Food Authority is in place from May 2010 and it will dedicate specific attention to the presence of chemicals in food and non-foods products.

At the beginning of the project through questionnaires we noted that the majority of consumers had no information on chemicals in food products. During this project period, after different information appeared on EDEN Center's website, the Ekolevizja newspaper, Mjedi sot and various other local media, and via distribution of leaflets (which contained information about chemicals), people have started become aware. What we expected to achieve was that through the labeling of food products, consumers will start to demand more information on what is consumed.

The cooperation with the National Food Authority is an initiative which will continue for a long time.

### **Impact on target policies:**

I think that we "woke up" a part of the government, that of the National Food Authority, setting in motion the investigation in Albanian markets.

They will come up very soon with a web page with information about chemicals in food products, which greatly improves the information and awareness approach of the government.

### **Outreach to stakeholders:**

Interested parties were: the Office of Consumer Protection, various state bodies (National Food Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection), media and consumers.

The implementation of this project combined a very interested approach in relations between the parties and this approach will continue further with the goodwill of these stakeholders.

State bodies will continue to take forward this relationship with occasional security checks of food products.

EDEN Center and the Office of Consumer Protection will publish ongoing information about chemicals in products on their web sites.

### **Deliverables, outputs and/or products:**

Public outreach through EDEN web site, Ekolevizja newspaper, and sending the assessment results to local media.

<http://www.eden-al.org/index.php?id=208>  
<http://www.eden-al.org/index.php?id=153>  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Qendra-EDEN-EDEN-Center/319334287560>

- 400 questionnaires were completed by volunteers at EDEN Center. 200 questionnaires were completed by investigating markets in Tirana and Durres and 200 other questionnaires were fulfilled for consumers of Tirana and Durres to understand how they receive information on chemicals and whether they thought that labeling of products was necessary (attached to the report are the results from these questionnaires).
- Report on the assessment result
- Issue paper
- 2000 fliers produced and distributed
- Articles publicized in Ekolevizja and in Mjediti sot newsletters.
- 3 spaces in the local media Ora News television, Albanian Public Television, and TV Koha television.

### Communication efforts:

After meeting with the National Food Authority and launching news of the EDEN web site-it was not an interest from local media. But they were not always present during the implementation of project. Moments when we needed local media we sent the invite to them to come and get more information on what we wanted to appear in the public. We have written articles on EDEN's website and the newspapers Mjediti Sot and Ekolevizja in order to raise the awareness of the public.



Photo taken in the meeting with NFA <http://www.eden-al.org/index.php?id=208>

### NGO Recommendations for next steps:

Community awareness on hazardous chemicals in food products by providing information on the EDEN web site's. Encouraging consumers to ask what is best for them and search the product labeling as Albanian law standards. Different activities in which consumers may have different information on the safety of food products.

Photos of volunteers speaking with consumers:



Photos of staff investigating product ingredients:

