What to Watch for at the 4th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4)

28 September – 2 October, 2015
Geneva, Switzerland

Delegates from more than 100 governments along with representatives of the chemical industry and public interest groups will evaluate progress and plan for the future at the only international forum that addresses global and national issues related to sound chemicals management. The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)[1] is coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). You can follow updates from IPEN on Twitter @toxicsfree and obtain more details about ICCM4 issues here: http://www.ipen.org/conferences/iccm4/overview.

Some important developments to watch for and track at this meeting include:

Future of international cooperation on sound chemicals management

SAICM is scheduled to expire in 2020 after the 5th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5). In 2020, delegates will evaluate SAICM's progress against its goal; *"achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle so that by 2020, chemicals are produced and used in ways that minimize significant adverse impacts on human health and the environment."* Meeting this goal by 2020 is highly unlikely as most of the objectives identified in the SAICM Global Plan of Action are still far from being achieved and the majority of emerging policy issues identified by countries are just beginning to be understood and addressed. In addition, new challenges will emerge as chemical production and use rapidly expands in developing and transition countries. This month's meeting is the last decision-making meeting prior to 2020, yet no preparatory meetings to consider SAICM's future are currently scheduled.

IPEN's View: Initiate a process to consider the future of SAICM[2]

With the current, rapid expansion of chemical use and chemical production in the developing world, there is a growing need for stronger, international cooperation on sound chemicals management. This is especially true in the many low- and middle-income countries that still have very weak legal, regulatory, institutional and technical infrastructures for protecting their countries' residents and environment from the harms associated with exposure to toxic chemicals and wastes. If the global community waits until 2020 to begin its considerations on the future of intergovernmental cooperation on chemical safety, SAICM will expire; there will be a gap; and critical momentum will be lost. One key element of SAICM's long-term success is sustainable financing. The key to securing sustainable funding for chemical safety is the internalization of costs within relevant producer industries.[3] Money needed to assure that chemicals are safely managed is ultimately the responsibility of chemical producing industries and should not be borne by governments or taxpayers. The global chemical industry has an annual turn-over of approximately USD $4.1 trillion per year.[4] If a global cost recovery scheme recovers USD $4.1 billion annually,[5] the total burden on the chemical producing industry would come to 0.1% of the industry's annual turnover – a very small cost relative to its size and considerably more than what donor governments can provide. For more information about this subject please see Annex 2 of IPEN's Beyond 2020 thought starter.[6]

Concrete steps to phase out highly hazardous pesticides

Highly hazardous pesticides threaten human health and the environment – so much so that in 2006 the FAO Council called for their progressive ban. Just prior to ICCM4, United Nations Member States will adopt 17 Sustainable

[1] http://www.saicm.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=512:iccm4-background&catid=223:iccm4&Itemid=697
[2] http://ipen.org/documents/thought-starter-international-cooperation-chemical-safety-beyond-2020
[3] Externalized costs of the chemical industry in low- and middle-income countries are staggering. The health-related pesticide costs in Sub-Saharan Africa ($90 billion), for example, dwarf the $4.8 billion provided in development assistance
[4] United Nations Environment Programme (2012) Global Chemicals Outlook
[5] See http://www.oecdwash.org/DATA/DOCS/env_outlook_chem_industry.pdf
[6] http://www.ipen.org/news/ipen-thought-starter-international-cooperation-chemical-safety-beyond-2020

Development Goals (SDGs).[7] *"Promote sustainable agriculture"* is part of Goal 2 and includes a target to *"ensure sustainable food production systems…that help maintain ecosystems."*

IPEN's View: Establish a Global Alliance to Phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides[8]

As FAO clearly states, highly hazardous pesticides are *"a significant cause of acute poisoning, chronic health problems and environmental damage."* This damage occurs under ordinary conditions of pesticide use in many developing and transition countries. That is why more than 140 countries expressed serious concern with highly hazardous pesticides during SAICM regional meetings in 2013 and 2014, and in December 2014, the 54 countries of the African region called on UN agencies to establish a Global Alliance to Phase-out Highly Hazardous Pesticides.

SAICM's five-year plan

ICCM4 will decide whether or not to endorse a guidance document (nicknamed the "OOG") that outlines processes and actions to be taken between now and 2020 to achieve SAICM's chemical safety goals.

IPEN's View: The OOG should be honest and focus on real change

In endorsing its five-year plan, ICCM4 should acknowledge that in most countries, only very limited progress has been made toward actually minimizing the significant adverse effects on human health and the environment associated with current patterns of chemical production, use, and end-of-life disposal. One reason for this is because governments and civil society organizations have not been able to access sufficient resources to implement the agreement. SAICM's objectives and actions between now and 2020 should focus on changing actual conditions in the world – eliminating lead in paint; banning highly hazardous pesticides, etc. –that will minimize and eliminate the adverse effects of current patterns of chemical production, use, and end-of-life disposal on human health and the environment.

Management of chemicals that fall outside of chemicals conventions

Emerging policy issues are key global chemical safety problems that fall outside existing chemicals conventions, but which scientific data indicates cause harm to human health and/or the environment. Current emerging policy issues include: lead paint; information about chemicals in products; hazardous chemicals in electronics; nanomaterials; and endocrine disrupting chemicals. ICCM4 will also consider one new issue: environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants. These issues frequently disproportionately impact people and environments in low- and middle-income countries. In many cases, governments of these countries do not yet have information about them or policies and programs to adequately tackle them. SAICM is the only global forum where these problems can be addressed.

IPEN's View: Take meaningful steps on key emerging chemical issues

One of SAICM's greatest potential strengths is as a place in which new chemical issues can be identified and discussed by the broad range of impacted stakeholders: government, civil society and industry. Key issues that ICCM4 should address include:

Lead in paint: By 2020, all countries should ban lead paint.[9]

Chemicals in products: Ensure individual and community right to know.[10]

Electronics: Identify and support non-toxic manufacturing processes, products produced without hazardous chemicals and safe end of life disposal methods.[11]

Nanomaterials: Develop a protocol for evaluating the safety of thousands of products that are entering the marketplace without testing or controls.[12]

Endocrine disrupting chemicals: Identify which substances should be addressed in these chemicals, which are widely present in products, food, pesticides and other sources.[13]

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[7] http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/
[8] http://www.saicm.org/images/saicm_documents/iccm/ICCM4/FINALmtgdoc/INFdoc/ICCM4_INF29_HHP_IPEN.pdf
[9] http://ipen.org/projects/eliminating-lead-paint
[10] http://ipen.org/news/comments-provided-fourth-version-saicms-chemicals-products-programme
[11] http://ipen.org/news/ipen-joins-ngos-around-globe-delivering-%E2%80%9Cchallenge%E2%80%9D-electronics-industry-toxic-chemicals
[12] http://ipen.org/toxic-priorities/nanotechnology
[13] http://ipen.org/documents/introduction-endocrine-disrupting-chemicals-edcs