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## **International POPs Elimination Project**

*Fostering Active and Efficient Civil Society Participation in  
Preparation for Implementation of the Stockholm Convention*

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### **National Workshop: Environmental and health problems of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs): Challenges for Costa Rica**

**Instituto Regional de Estudios en Sustancias Tóxicas  
(IRET) Universidad Nacional**

**Costa Rica  
March 2006**

## About the International POPs Elimination Project

On May 1, 2004, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN <http://www.ipen.org>) began a global NGO project called the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided core funding for the project.

IPEP has three principal objectives:

- Encourage and enable NGOs in 40 developing and transitional countries to engage in activities that provide concrete and immediate contributions to country efforts in preparing for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention;
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process;
- Help establish regional and national NGO coordination and capacity in all regions of the world in support of longer term efforts to achieve chemical safety.

IPEP will support preparation of reports on country situation, hotspots, policy briefs, and regional activities. Three principal types of activities will be supported by IPEP: participation in the National Implementation Plan, training and awareness workshops, and public information and awareness campaigns.

For more information, please see <http://www.ipen.org>

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not necessarily the views of the institutions providing management and/or financial support.

This report is available in the following languages: English

# National Workshop: Environmental and health problems of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs): Challenges for Costa Rica

## Location

The workshop was held on March 21, 2006 at the Hotel Bouganvillea, located in Santo Domingo de Heredia, Costa Rica. It was jointly organized by the following institutions: Regional Institute for Studies on Toxic Substances (*Instituto Regional de Estudios en Sustancias Tóxicas*—IRET) – National University, International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), Pesticide Action Network—Latin America (*Red de Acción en Plaguicidas y sus Alternativas para América Latina*—RAPAL) and the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (*Ministerio del Ambiente y Energía*—MINAE), with financial support from GEF, UNITAR, UNIDO, UNEP and SWISS AID.

## Audience and general topics

The workshop was directed at nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, municipalities and civil society in general, and the objective was basically to make general information regarding persistent organic pollutants (POPs) available to workshop participants. Specifically, this information includes: what POPs are, the substances identified as POPs, their effects on health and the environment, and the situation with these pollutants in Costa Rica and Central America, plus what the Stockholm Convention is, what it establishes, what the National Implementation Plan is, what has been done in Costa Rica to place this plan into effect, the ratification of the Convention, and other related topics. Prior to the workshop, organizers prepared folders with bibliographical information to be provided to each of the workshop participants.

## Participants

A total of 23 persons attended the workshop, with the following organizations and institutions represented:

- Center for Environmental and Natural Resources Law (*Centro de Derecho Ambiental y de los Recursos Naturales*—CEDARENA)
- Emaús Forum (*Foro Emaús*)
- Association for the Preservation of Flora and Fauna (*Asociación Preservacionista de Flora y Fauna Silvestre*—APREFOFLAS)
- Educational Corporation for the Development of Costa Rica (*Corporación Educativa para el Desarrollo Costarricense*—CEDECO)
- Conservationist Federation (*Federación Conservacionista*—FECON)
- Network of Social Organizations and NGOs with Alternative Projects in Rural Development (*Red de Organizaciones Sociales y ONG con Proyectos Alternativos de Desarrollo Rural*—COPROALDE)
- Regional Institute for Studies on Toxic Substances (*Instituto Regional de Estudios en Sustancias Tóxicas*—IRET) – National University

- Waste Management and Water Quality Laboratory (*Laboratorio en Gestión de Desechos y Calidad de Aguas*) – School of Chemistry (*Escuela de Química*) – National University
- Entomology Laboratory (*Laboratorio de Entomología*) – School of Agrarian Sciences (*Escuela de Ciencias Agrarias*) – National University
- Ministry of the Environment and Energy (*Ministerio del Ambiente y Energía—MINAE*)
- International POPs Elimination Network—IPEN
- Institutional Commission on Occupational Health (*Comisión Institucional de Salud Ocupacional*) – Workers’ Union of the University of Costa Rica (*Sindicato de trabajadores de la Universidad de Costa Rica*)
- Municipality of Belén
- Municipality of Escazú
- Municipality of San José
- Center for Environmental Pollution Research (*Centro en Investigación en Contaminación Ambiental*) – University of Costa Rica

## **Agenda**

8:30 a.m. Registration of participants and distribution of materials.

9:00 The actual event began with a presentation by Fabio Chaverri (of IRET), who welcomed all the participants, quickly reviewed the agenda and coordinated the presentation of participants.

9:30 a.m. Fernando Ramírez (of IRET – UNA and RAPAL) presented a talk entitled “Introduction to the issue of POPs,” explaining a series of general aspects characterizing POPs, including what they are, which substances are included, what their characteristics are, what the Stockholm Convention is, and what points are established by the Convention.

10:10 a.m. There was a 20 minute recess, after which activities were initiated again at 10:30 a.m. Then, Pilar Alfaro (of MINAE) presented a talk entitled “The situation of POPs in Costa Rica,” in which she primarily gave an account of the progress made and problems encountered in the implementation of the National Plan established in the Stockholm Convention.

11:00 a.m., Fernando Bejarano (of RAPAM and IPEN) presented a talk entitled “Inventories of dioxins. Challenges and contributions for the prioritization and estimation of sources,” in which he presented a critical review of emission factors in the Toolkit developed by Pat Costner, as well as other aspects.

12:00 noon, Luisa Castillo (of UNA) made a presentation entitled “POPs in the Central American and Caribbean region,” in which she reported the results of a diagnostic assessment of POPs in Central America and the Caribbean.

12:40 p.m. Fernando Bejarano coordinated a participative discussion activity entitled “The role of Nongovernmental Organizations, Academia and Civil Society in General, in relation to POPs and the Stockholm Convention.” During this activity each of the participants proposed actions and measures that should be implemented in order to comply with what has been established in the Stockholm Convention, with the aim of reducing and eliminating the production of persistent organic pollutants. These proposals were subsequently discussed in a plenary session.

Lastly, two videos were presented on Incineration in Argentina and the problem of the incineration of wastes in cement kilns in the United States

### **Recommendations**

Following are the proposals from the workshop discussion:

1. It is necessary to develop a strategy to assure that the Stockholm Convention is ratified by the Costa Rican government, that is, to carry out actions in exercising citizens’ rights to express the demands of those governed, to those in a position of governing. In this specific case, this involves establishing the Convention as a solution to an existing set of problems.
2. It is necessary to create mechanisms for incorporating and promoting the active participation of civil society in the National Coordination System, the entity taking the lead in the process of implementing the National Plan as established in the Stockholm Convention.
3. A strategy is needed for broadly disseminating the contents of the Stockholm Convention and information regarding POPs and their effects. To accomplish this goal, information must be presented in a simple, clear and concise manner, to assist civil society in understanding it. Carrying out information campaigns directed at specific sectors is an effective tool for achieving the above. It is important to develop “popular” versions of the Stockholm Convention, explaining what POPs are, as well as the problems involved, to facilitate an understanding of this topic.
4. The strategy for disseminating information should be carried out at the local level, since transmitting information at this level is easier, and it is also easier to detect and resolve problems, such as the burning of trash in backyards, etc. Municipalities play a key role in these actions, particularly the Environmental Commissions.
5. It is necessary that those in charge of occupational health, as well as municipal emergency committees, development associations, and even the Health Ministry become involved in a committed way with the issue of POPs.

6. Voluntary community work should be included in the strategy for disseminating information, as a way to involve civil society, as well as to motivate NGOs to actively participate in the strategy.
7. Information related to persistent organic pollutants should be actively disseminated among the agricultural sector, since agricultural producers are precisely those using the pesticides established as candidates for being included in the POPs list.
8. It is also necessary to inform agricultural producers regarding the generation of POPs caused by the agricultural practice of burning.
9. It is necessary to stimulate efforts in the research and generation of technology in order to have friendly alternatives for substituting POPs that have been prohibited, and to work toward reducing and if possible, eliminating the production of POPs that continue to be generated.
10. Research and generation of technology must play an especially important role in developing alternatives to currently-used incineration practices.
11. It is necessary to enhance the monitoring and analytical capacities of laboratories in the detection and quantification of POPs, since important decisions must be made on the basis of results from such analysis. At the same time, it is necessary to include a trained technical group in the National Implementation Plan for the Stockholm Convention, including individuals who will serve as advisors and observers to ensure that the best possible actions are taken.
12. It is necessary to incorporate POPs and International Conventions among the topics included in educational plans, and to motivate members of the academic community to promote an “environmental culture and concern” in students. It is also important that professors explain all the “sides” of the issue to students, to enable them to form their own criteria and opinions regarding this issue.
13. Clearly, efforts in establishing solutions to problems related to POPs must be coordinated among all the involved “actors,” including academia, industry, NGOs, municipalities, the federal government and civil society. To this end, it is necessary to reconcile the positions and viewpoints of the diverse actors, in order to reach agreements and avoid conflicts.
14. It is necessary to create a Costa Rican network for exchanging information, initially among the participants from this workshop, and subsequently and gradually incorporating new elements, with the aim of establishing strategies for carrying out the actions mentioned above.
15. It is important to establish mechanisms for creating commitments and alliances with the industrial sector, to reduce and eliminate the intentional and unintentional

production of POPs in their productive processes. It would also be a positive step forward to define the strategies to carry out jointly with this sector.

16. It is necessary to relocate industry outside urban and productive areas, in order to “reduce” the population’s contact with POPs.
17. It is necessary to establish efficient mechanisms for applying sanctions to those who fail to comply with the provisions established for the use and handling of POPs.

During the event a letter was circulated among participants, inviting them to add their signatures to express their demand that authorities ratify the Stockholm Convention. This letter will be sent to the corresponding authorities. Also, all participants received a copy of the established list of proposals by email, and were asked to review the proposals and add any additional comments, suggestions or corrections to the list. All proposed modifications will be sent to IRET, which will be responsible for preparing the final document.

A final report on the workshop will be prepared, for the purpose of summarizing the most important aspects discussed during the event, with special emphasis placed on the proposals established by participants. This report will be sent to all workshop participants and will also be available to the general public.

### **Future plans**

There are plans to carry out some follow-up activities to the workshop, such as small information campaigns in universities and common meeting places, aimed at bringing information to civil society and inviting citizens to express their support for the ratification of the Stockholm Convention. To achieve the latter, signatures will be collected and sent to the corresponding authorities.

At the end of the workshop, participants were highly motivated to continue to work together, as a network, to exchange information in this area, and there was a proposal that a type of forum be created. As a final comment, it was felt that the overall result of the workshop was very positive.