



Swiss Agency for  
Development  
and Cooperation  
SDC



Swiss Agency for  
the Environment,  
Forests and  
Landscape SAEFL

## **International POPs Elimination Project**

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

---

# **Country Situation Report on POPs in Venezuela**

**María Eugenia Gil Beroes  
Fundacion Aguaclara**



**Venezuela  
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>

IPEN gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Global Environment Facility, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Swiss Agency for the Environment Forests and Landscape, the Canada POPs Fund, the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM), Mitchell Kapor Foundation, Sigrid Rausing Trust, New York Community Trust and others.

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

# Country Situation Report on POPs in Venezuela

## Summary

This report is based on several academic and governmental documents as well interviews with experts on the theme, as well members of the Coordination Committee of the National Implementation Plan of the Stockholm Convention.

## Ratification and Organization of the National Implementation Plan

The Stockholm Convention was ratified by Venezuela on 1 March 2005 according to the Gaceta Oficial 38.098. This implies its incorporation as law within the entire country. The Venezuelan government signed a contract for \$ 463.000 with UNIDO to develop the National Implementation Plan.

The national focal point within the Environment and Natural Resource Ministry (Ministerio del Ambiente y de los Recursos Naturales) is the Director General of Environmental Quality (Dirección General de Calidad Ambiental), which organized a coordination unit to develop the National Implementation Plan, called UCEPNI.

The focal point also formed a national committee for the project called CNP. The members of the CNP consist of the following stakeholders: official functionaries from all the ministries related to the Convention due to the area of competence: Environment, Labor, Economy, Health, Education, Food, Energy, Agriculture; the basic State's industries such as Petróleos de Venezuela PDVSA, Corporación Venezolana de Guayana CVG, Compañía de Administración y Fomento Eléctrico CADAFE; the private industrial sector Fedecamaras, Asoquim, Afaquima; the NGOs Rapal-Ve and Aguaclara; and the universities Católica Andrés Bello and Centro de Estudios del Ambiente CENAMB, from the Universidad Central de Venezuela.

The CNP is organized by working groups: Health, Finance, Technical Aspects, Legal Aspects, and Education and Community Participation. In addition, the CNP has three area coordinators, one for each group of POPs. From Aguaclara's point of view we feel a clear imbalance between the governmental and non-governmental participation on the Committee. Each ministry has more than one representative meanwhile the nongovernmental side has just one.

Community participation is not yet consolidated at the CNP. This is one of the tasks for the Education and Community Participation working group. There is a consensus in the CNP about the need to extend the project and make it a whole-nation plan, where the communities take ownership of the plan so that it becomes a real warranty for effective implementation of the Convention.

Due to several administrative changes at all levels at the Ministerio del Ambiente, the CNP was almost inactive for seven months. Therefore the coordinating unit called again for nominations to the working groups.

### **Persistent Organic Pesticides**

None of the POPs pesticides listed under Annex A of the Stockholm's Convention are produced or formulated in the country. DDT, is the only one that has an authorization to be used in case of an epidemic situation and it is under the custody of the Ministry of Health. Unofficial sources have informed to some members of the CNP about its illegal traffic and use on some agriculture fields.

The better-known stock of pesticides in the country is the millions of kilograms under the custody of the Environment Ministry that includes aldrin, dieldrin, mirex, toxaphene, DDT, and Chlordane. These pesticides were, without any kind of surveillance, contaminating four towns for more than 40 years; Camatagua in Aragua, Tocuyito en Carabobo, and Valera and El Cenizo in Trujillo. No research or environmental assessment has been done on the sites or communities where they were stored. For the past four years, the Ministry has been trying to move them out of the Venezuela following the legal restrictions of the Basel Convention. So far just one ship has carried pesticides to Germany.

Several academic studies made during 1980–1993, at the Department of Agronomy in the Central University of Venezuela, shows the presence of POPs in human milk, butter, margarines, water for human consumption, human blood and vegetables.

### **Suspected deposits of obsolete POPs Pesticides, located up to January 2006**

According to the pesticides coordinator in the CNP, Professor Rodolfo Marcano in the Agronomy Faculty, Universidad Central de Venezuela, the following sites are suspected to have POPs pesticides:

- National Laboratory of Pesticides and Fertilizers of the Agriculture Ministry y Cria. Located in the Agronomy Faculty at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, Maracay, Aragua.
- Fundacion de Servicios al Agricultor (FUSAGRI), a farmer service foundation that no longer operates; owned in the past by Shell Company in the 1960's at Cagua, Aragua. Shell was the main importer of all the "drins" pesticides
- The Deposits of the Ministry of Health all around the country.
- Customs at the commercial port of La Guaira, Vargas.
- Septic well at Yaracuy.

There is a need to conduct studies for characterization of these stockpiles to determine quantities of POPs contents and develop a plan for appropriate treatment according to the Stockholm Convention

## **Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)**

According to the Environment and Natural Resources Ministry there is a preliminary inventory of 3,300 metric tons which belongs to the big industries of the state. This preliminary inventory allows location of the main places with PCB's, even though the inventories at the industries are not characterized.

The main industries are aware of the PCBs problem, and some of them have been exporting equipment and others are trying to move wastes out of the country.

The medium and small industries are not involved in the inventory process yet and according to this preliminary inventory it seems they could be unintentional producers of PCBs.

A preliminary assessment of the laws and regulations made by the Environment Ministry the Simon Bolivar University indicates that despite having environmental laws and even the ratification of the Stockholm Convention, there is no legal frame which allows for the proper handling of PCBs.

## **Dioxins and Furans**

The coordination of the Dioxins and Furans group, presented a result of 62.5% of the inventory done, according to the UNEP Toolkit. According to some very preliminary figures of some sources, the following sources have been identified as a source of concern for air emissions: uncontrolled combustion, forest fires, and backyard burning. This is common result when the UNEP Toolkit is used. The UNEP Toolkit contains emission factors primarily derived from processes and practices in developed countries and substitution of its factors with those derived from the scientific literature or other government agencies can alter the source priorities as well as the total dioxin emissions per year. The result is that using the Toolkit can overestimate releases from some sources and underestimate releases from others. A recent documents this using actual inventory data from Argentina, Cuba, and Mexico (Costner P, RAPAM, 2005. Estimating releases and prioritizing sources in the context of the Stockholm Convention [http://www.oztoxics.org/ipepweb/projects/project%20index\\_5\\_1.html](http://www.oztoxics.org/ipepweb/projects/project%20index_5_1.html)).

There is a huge problem with garbage dumps. There are no official figures but there are roughly 3,000 open dumps operating without any kind of treatment where the waste is mixed including domestic, industrial, and even hospital waste. There are communities making a living from the collection and recycling of garbage. The fires at these dumps are sometimes spontaneous but most of the time results from the people who live nearby. According to the Coordinator of this group it is possible to see chloracne (indicating dioxin exposure) in some of the people who live near some of these dumps.

Another limitation of the Toolkit is that it has no emissions factor for the oil industry, which is a very important limitation for an oil-producing country such as Venezuela

## **Citizen participation in the National Implementation Plan**

### **General recommendations**

- To inform the National Assembly (Asamblea Nacional) (maximum legislative forum) about the NIP through its commissions of: Environment, Health and Foreign Affairs and make them actors on the decisions to improve the implementation of the Plan. The same goes for the Ministers and their functionaries related to the Convention due to their areas of competence.
- To give information to the organized civil society following Article 10 of the Stockholm Convention especially to grassroots groups including women, land, health, indigenous, environmental NGOs, general public and mass media.
- To create centers for the National Implementation Plan in each of the 24 states of the country or even in each county. Especially in those counties considered hot spots.
- To consider more solid scientifically-based emission factors as illustrated in the IPEN review of the UNEP Toolkit Report for the Forest Fires, Grassland and Moor Fires, Open Burning of Agricultural Residues, Open Burning of Domestic Waste, Landfill and Dump Fires in the national dioxin inventory to better reflect reality and priorities in the National Implementation Plan
- In order to strengthen the organized civil society, we propose improving the relationship between toxicology centers with traditional farmers, with the farmers who work with integral approach or biological control, other universities and research centers related with POPs in any way.
- To support all the initiatives to achieve a unified register of toxicology in order to improve epidemiological data and the promotion of toxicological information about POPs and persistent toxic substances
- The remediation of contaminated places is urgent. For instance with regards to garbage dumps it is very important to give all the information we can get to the Venezuelan Association of Mayors and FUNDACOMUN, which is a governmental agency that advises about solid waste, in order to generate alternatives, better practices, promoting the segregation at source, compost, reuse and recycling, and in order to get better waste management and the reduction at the source..
- A challenge we have is to involve the oil industry in the NIP. In the CNP are present the members of the Instituto Tecnológico Venezolano del Petróleo (INTEVEP) that represent Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). It is necessary to establish appropriate emission factors for dioxin and other unintentional POPs. At the present moment we have no laboratory facilities to conducting the necessary tests for the oil industry or other industries on this specific group of POPs. Therefore, an appropriate contribution of PDVSA to the Stockholm Convention is to pay for the tests abroad or finance the construction of the lab in Venezuela.

- Article 11 of the Stockholm Convention is important in Venezuela since it is about capacity building. This would help carry information to factories and industries, universities and research centers and to motivate them and consequently generate a better approach to the remediation of the problems caused by these polluter

For information about this report, its sources, or further information please contact:  
fundacionaguaclara@cantv.net