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International POPs Elimination Project

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

Enhancement of Public Participation in Decision-making on Reduction of POPs Environmental Releases

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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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At the initial stage of the project, we organised activities to identify key issues and problems of relevance for NGOs that deal with minimisation of POPs environmental releases.

Questionnaire on wastes and POPs

To this end, we drafted a questionnaire and mailed it to NGOs, using our NGO mailing lists. Overall, 118 NGOs were questioned, including 85 NGOs operating in the Southern Federal District of Russia.

Almost 90% of surveyed NGOs admitted that they are directly interested in the problem of waste generation and disposal in large cities and minor towns, as well as in the problems of waste disposal in landfills that meet applicable Russian standards and regulations (actually waste dumps). Almost half of our respondents particularly focused on a separate group of problems associated with industrial, hazardous and toxic wastes and their treatment. As a key problem they suggested lack of information on sources of environmental releases of POPs and available technologies, allowing minimisation POPs emissions and opportunities to introduce these technologies in Russian production facilities.

The other 10% of NGO respondents suggested the following problems: health and environmental impacts of POPs (5%), consulting in the sphere of waste treatment technologies (3%), legislative activities and legal assistance in the sphere of waste management and addressing associated problems (2%).

Approximately 25% of the surveyed NGOs directly deal with POPs-related problems. About half of them (45%) are aware of the problem, while 20% of the NGOs have not ever heard about the problem (predominantly NGOs from smaller cities). Almost all NGOs that deal with the problems of POPs were (to a greater or lesser extent) interested in discussions, decision-making or organisation of activities for prevention of design/construction of waste incinerators.

Seminar for stakeholders

Environmental NGOs of Russia consider introduction of a waste management option that would prevent or at least minimise POPs environmental releases as a matter of principle. In this connection, approaches of governmental environmental agencies have a major role to play and the same is true for regional/local decision-makers, managers of industrial facilities and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In order to discuss these issues, we organised a seminar with participation of the NGOs surveyed and representatives of relevant governmental bodies.

The seminar was attended by 14 representatives of NGOs, 3 representatives of governmental environmental bodies and 5 businessmen, including managers of industrial facilities. Representatives of Volgograd mass media outlets were invited to participate in the proceedings of the final session of the seminar.

In the course of the seminar, its participants were informed on the experience of other countries in the sphere of reforming municipal waste management, including California (USA), Buenos Aires (Argentina), and India. A brief analysis of the Guidelines on Alternative Non-incineration POPs Elimination Technologies of the US EPA was also provided. The Guidelines provide a brief review and assessment of these technologies, including potential POPs for elimination, media, requirements for installations and associated costs, as well as examples of application of these technologies. The Guidelines cover both existing technologies and the ones that have not been commercially applied yet. In addition, the Guidelines contain a list of references on non-incineration POPs elimination technologies.

The seminar participants discussed municipal waste management programs, developed for Moscow, Smolensk, Pskov and Yaroslavl oblast that demonstrated potential options for managerial decisions in Russia. As a major component, these programs incorporate development of finance strategies for waste management at the regional/municipal level.

Informational materials

A package of informational materials on the available experience of sustainable waste management and the information booklet (1000 copies) were developed for the seminar. These materials were distributed among participants of the seminar for further dissemination in their regions.

Waste management in Moscow

The seminar participants noted that, in recent years, the rates of municipal waste accumulation in Moscow have increased substantially. As a major city, the Russian capital is comparable with other cities of the world in terms of generation of municipal and bulky waste now. However, in contrast to Western cities, that have been operating waste separation technologies for a long time, our waste containers are filled with all types of waste now, including bottles, plastic and metal cans, food waste and paper.

Now, solid municipal waste from Moscow is delivered to about 10 landfills, located in Moscow Oblast. The largest and better equipped ones - "Khmetievo" and "Dmitrovskiy" are expected to receive about 1.5 million tons of solid municipal waste in 2005 alone. The Government of Moscow predominantly focuses on waste incineration, instead of construction of new landfills. There are two already operational waste incineration plants in the city now - in Altufievo and Rudnevo. Two similar plants are being reconstructed now. After commissioning of the fifth waste incineration plant, almost 70% of all waste might be incinerated.

Foreign financial support and waste strategy

The majority of the seminar participants believe that foreign financial support is one of the factors that promotes development of incineration technologies in Russia. The high costs of construction of waste incineration plants are partially covered by funds, provided in the framework of technical assistance programs or investment contracts with Western companies.

In this connection, it is necessary to have adequate information resources to allow assessment of the environmental and economic performance of proposed technical solutions and to account for available non-incineration alternatives.

The experience in Volgograd Oblast

In the course of discussions on industrial waste, including POPs, the seminar participants studied the experience of Volgograd Oblast, pertaining to information co-operation between environmental NGOs and industrial facilities. Such co-operation allows making information on waste amounts and sources easily accessible.

The seminar participants particularly focused on issues of information policies, incentives for waste processing facilities and industrial facilities that may operate non-incineration technologies for elimination of POPs and other types of toxic waste.

Participants of the seminar generally agreed with the need to develop a universally accessible information resource on problems of POPs-containing waste and relevant waste elimination technologies.

In order to prevent the growth of POPs waste generation in the territory of Volgograd Oblast, in the framework of the project, public hearings were conducted on the problem of construction of the toxic waste incineration unit at the site of "Khimprom" Co. facility (located within the Volgograd city area) and implementation of plans to construct municipal waste incineration plants in smaller towns of the oblast (towns with populations of 80,000 – 130,000 residents).

Note that Khimprom is a huge chemicals complex which has different branches in different cities and towns.

Official requests on waste management plans were submitted to local self-government bodies, environmental supervisory agencies, the Centre of International Projects and experts, who assessed feasibility of introduction of toxic waste incinerators at Russian facilities.

Participants of the public hearings reviewed the positions of "Khimprom" Co. and environmental NGOs ("Volgograd-Ecopress" Information Centre, "Ecology" Club, the Environmental Parliament and "Green Orbit" Centre).

"Khimprom" Co. representatives failed to provide substantive evidence of safety and economic appropriateness of commissioning of the RAST-8 unit for PCBs elimination to

members of the general public. Moreover, their references to international experts were refuted by documented responses of the expert themselves. Representatives of the Russian Environmental Technical Supervision Service assured the participants, that the project is a subject for the state environmental assessment.

In addition to Volgograd residents, the public hearings were also attended by representatives of municipalities of Volgograd Oblast, located nearby "Khimprom" Co. facility. In particular, representatives of Gornopolyanskiy Township Council strongly protested against commissioning of the incineration unit, arguing that it might negatively affect quality of municipal agricultural land and local summer houses.

Besides that, participants of the public hearings were provided information on plans to allocate financial resources from the oblast budget for construction of a waste incineration plant in the territory of the oblast.

Participants of the public hearings approved the following final decisions:

1. To conduct a public environmental assessment of the project of commissioning of the plasma PCBs elimination unit at "Khimprom" Co. facility.
2. To establish public control of environmental expenditures of the oblast budget, including, in particular, expenditures to address the problem of waste in the territory of the oblast.
3. To implement an information campaign in district-level mass media outlets for the city residents on prevention of implementation of municipal waste incineration projects.