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International POPs Elimination Project

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

**Training junk dealers to learn about POPs
present and/or created in their premises and to
understand the importance of minimizing them**

Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group

**India
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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.

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

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This report is available in the following languages: English

Training junk dealers to learn about POPs present/ created in their premises and to understand the importance of minimizing the POPs

I. Project Background

There are various types of POPs found in the segregation and storage spaces of junk shop owners. These include PVC wires (burned to procure copper); pesticide cans and large industrial containers; plastics containing brominated flame retardants (BFRs) that have POPs characteristics; and old PCB-containing electrical equipment. Some of these, such as PVC coated copper wires, are burned and release dioxins. Pesticide containers contain residues that are disposed of in the soil and drain and come in physical contact with handlers.

This project sought to work with the junk dealers, mostly illiterate, to make them aware of the problems associated with POPs in their waste and enable them to recognize POPs bearing waste. It helped them determine better handling practices in some cases. It also sought to help them build up a collective perspective on POPs.

The aims of the project, therefore, were:

- To innovatively create awareness about POPs amongst junk dealers.
- To help them identify the most common sources of POPs in trashed materials.
- To help find alternative ways to handle these or eliminate these from their workplace.
- To set up a registry where they may report the presence of possible POPs bearing waste.

II. Our Work

Chintan undertook a survey with the *kabaris* (Junk dealers). This showed that the chief issue of concern was PVC wires, being burned to extract copper. Many other issues were found to be less relevant on the ground, since transformers containing PCBs were rare and hard to detect, and pesticide containers often contained other residues, which may or may not be POPs. Given the focus of this undertaking on POPs, we worked on PVC coated copper wires.

The following activities were undertaken:

1. A Survey

A survey was undertaken to ascertain the kind of POPs that junk dealers may be exposed to or dealing with. Copper wires were seen to be the main concern, as they were burned.

2. Group Discussions

Three group discussions were held to understand this issue further. It was seen that the practices were varied and depended upon time, type of wire, area where the junk dealer's shop was located etc. In general, it was also seen that a wider survey was required to understand this problem.

3. A Data Collection Exercise

A larger data collection exercise was undertaken, with 100 junk dealers. This was focused upon practices related to burning of copper coated PVC wires. The following was concluded:

- Every junk dealer received such wires
- The thin wires were burned
- Thick wires were not burned as the copper was blackened, reducing its price from Rs. 52 per kilo to anything under Rs. 48 per kilo
- Many junk dealers also did not burn thin wires as they claimed the pollution was very high. Upon interrogating, the pollution was found to be related to smoke and the pungent odor. Toxics were not discussed by any of the dealers. One reason amongst many others for pollution consciousness was the displeasure of the neighbourhood.
- Small scraps of wire were most likely to be burned compared to longer ones.
- We were able to find junk dealers who had hired people to strip the wires, even thin ones, using special knives.
- Wires were easier to strip in the summer, when the PVC was softer. In the winter, wire stripping was done after the wires were allowed to lie in the sun, if possible. Alternatively, they were either sold as it is or burned for heat and removed before once the copper was exposed.

4. Workshops

A series of workshops were held using resource persons, doctors and Chintan personnel. The first of these workshops was with 32 junk dealers of Takiya Kale Khan, in Central Delhi. The approach was two pronged. First, their health and the problem of PVC were discussed. Additionally, the problem of children's health was discussed. Secondly, the problem of nuisance value was discussed, as this was a threat the *kabaris* themselves perceived. Many junk dealers put in their experiences as

well. The workshop concluded with a plan to determine how junk dealers in the area would handle PVC wires. This was discussed in the second workshop, where samples were displayed to show how each type could be sold without burning.

Following this, eight workshops were held in the following four areas: *Madanpur Khadar*, *Harikesh Nagar*, ITO area and *Seemapuri*. The leaders from each of the areas were gathered to receive additional information in the 9th workshop. Many of them felt that the workshops should be expanded to at least 100 more junk dealers.

In order to do this, four junk dealers were trained to share some of the ideas with other groups. Although they were able to do so in relation to wires, it was found that handling the entire issue of POPs was too complex for them. Hence, they were trained once more to discuss the issue in terms of dioxin and burning PVC wires. They were able to train 52 more junk dealers. In all, therefore, 202 junk dealers were trained directly.

Two types of specialists were part of the team: one for environmental health and the other, a former PVC wire recycler. While the latter was unable to spare time to attend all the workshops, he was able to spend time in Chintan to help identify the devices used by the industry and help design it. The environmental health specialist worked with Chintan's internal resources to train one batch of junk dealers and help the team working with junk dealers to understand POPs and human health. He also met individuals from amongst junk dealers to discuss thoughts.

In this manner, 13 workshops were held.

5. Monitoring the Impact

The initial idea was to create a registry. However, given that there was only one item of concern coupled with the low literacy levels, it was decided not to follow this strategy as it would be cumbersome. Instead, it was decided to work on the idea of neighborhood checks, where junk dealers would check one another. Some of them were particularly enthusiastic and make special efforts towards this.

One trend observed was that it was younger junk dealers who were the most interested in these ideas and willing to implement with zeal.

III. Challenges

It was hard to get data about the dioxins and PVC burning in the presence of copper. Hence, we were unable to add these components to either our workshops or our own knowledge, to be used for advocacy in the future. We hope to procure this information in the future.

It was also hard to find pre-existing training materials in Hindi about POPs. This would have helped us to complete our work with greater ease, as training the internal team and creating information for educated junk dealers would be easier. We hope to remedy this in the future.

One of the shortcomings of the project was that there was less training available for the workers in the junk shops. Also, such training was required in diverse languages, mostly Bhojpuri and Bengali, which was not possible this time.

Given that many women also work in junk shops, specific workshops could have been held to create awareness amongst them, using the larger project as the framework. This was due to limited resources. The next time, this will be factored in as well.

Thin wires maybe burned at the re-processing stage, in some part of the country, creating POPs.

IV. Results

The following results were seen:

1. The notion of POPs amongst junk dealers
2. The understanding of the problem of burning PVC coated copper wires amongst junk dealers
3. A clear alternative for some wires, comprising both cutting and a shift in the trade practices
4. A clear need to avoid burning waste seen amongst junk dealers