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Substances, soil and biotechnology

IFCS Forum VI

International transport of lead
and cadmium via trade:
an international concern?

Dakar, Senegal
15 – 19 September 2008



Agenda

Lead and Cadmium

The Forum VI session on lead and cadmium responds to the requests of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), UNEP Governing Council and Forum V to identify effective ways to reduce exposure and to promote reduction of risks. The session is intended to complement other ongoing United Nations work on lead and cadmium by providing input to discussions on the subject that may take place in 2009 at the second International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM-2) and the Twenty-Fifth Session of the UNEP Governing Council.



Increasing Trade

Global trade in products and materials is expanding dramatically, due to:

- rapid globalization
- global use of ores, compounds, products, and wastes

Trade in products containing lead and cadmium is identified as an important dispersal route.

Concern for vulnerable groups, such as infants, children and pregnant women has increased.



Does Trade in a Hazardous Substance Present an International Concern?

- Examples of multilateral agreements that identified trade as part of the risk:
 - Montreal Protocol on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer
 - Stockholm Convention
 - Rotterdam Convention
 - Basel Convention
 - Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)



Does the failure to regulate international trade of a hazardous substance sufficiently lead to an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment in other countries?

- Can a significant risk be traced to the trade?
- Is it reasonably foreseeable that the trade will contribute to the risk?
- Does the exporting or importing country avoid internalizing the environmental and health risks or costs related to its consumption, and instead externalizes those costs to its trading partners and consumers?
- Are there mitigating factors related to the trade, such as increased incomes in poor countries?



Do Trade-Related Actions Increase the Risk of Harm from Lead and Cadmium?

- Trade flows of lead and cadmium and products and wastes containing them are complex due to rapid globalization.
- In rapidly industrializing countries with export-driven economies, a large amount of the environmental health risk from production and use of lead and cadmium may be traced to overseas demand for processed materials and manufactured products.
- Demand is driven significantly by consumer preference for inexpensive products.



Do Trade-Related Actions Increase the Risk of Harm from Lead and Cadmium?

- International trade of e-waste (including “used” electronics that effectively are e-waste) flows from developed to developing countries and economies in transition.
- The devastating environmental health impacts to trash pickers, recyclers, their families and communities are increasingly well-documented and foreseeable.



Prevention vs Remediation

- Preventive measures to control trade flows of lead and cadmium could not only be effective, but could also be among the most efficient.
- Measures that prevent environmental health harms from happening are usually far less expensive than the costs of dealing with the harm after it has occurred.



International Trade

Questions to the Forum

- Does dispersal of lead and cadmium through international trade as commodities, in products and wastes warrant coordinated international action to protect human health and the environment?
- Does such trade lead to problems that cannot be sufficiently addressed by countries acting alone?
- Do those problems rise to the level of an international concern?
- Do they call for a coordinated international approach to addressing them irrespective of the legal nature of the measures?

The Forum may wish to examine these questions from the point of view of both producing and consuming countries, and especially developing countries and countries in transition.