



The Sound Management of Chemicals in North America

The Sound Management of Chemicals (SMOC) initiative is a trilateral effort to reduce the risks of toxic substances to human health and the environment in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The SMOC initiative was established by resolution of the Council of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) of North America at its second regular meeting, in October 1995, in Oaxaca, Mexico.

The priority of the SMOC project is the management and control of substances that are persistent and toxic. It provides a forum for:

- identifying priority chemical pollution issues of regional concern;
- developing North American Regional Action Plans (NARAPs) to address these concerns;
- providing meaningful public input into the decision making process
- overseeing the implementation of approved NARAPs; and
- facilitating and encouraging capacity building in support of the overall goals of the SMOC, with emphasis on the implementation of approved NARAPs, and
- providing public reports on progress.

Capacity building

Capacity building is critical to the implementation of the SMOC initiative and to the NARAPs developed under it, and its integration into most aspects of SMOC activities has become a high priority. A Capacity Building Task Force was established in 1998 to develop the conceptual basis and strategy to help guide efforts in this area.

While each of the three countries have capacity building and coordination requirements related to the SMOC initiative, the primary focus of capacity-building activities is in Mexico, which will bear the major costs associated with implementation of the NARAPs. Emphasis is being placed on leveraging new or additional funds from international funding institutions to assist Mexico in implementing the Sound Management of Chemicals program.

North American Regional Action Plans (NARAPs)

The initial focus of the SMOC initiative has been to develop NARAPs for chemicals that are persistent and toxic. The NARAPs represent a long-term commitment to regional action. They include a commitment to work cooperatively by building upon international environmental agreements, existing policies and laws. They also bring a regional perspective to international initiatives that are in place or being negotiated on persistent toxic substances. To date, NARAPs have been developed for four substances:

- Chlordane. Established in 1997, the chlordane NARAP is a success story that has resulted in the elimination of the production and use of this substance in North America.
- DDT. Another success story; under this NARAP, Mexico stopped using DDT in 2000 and now North America is "DDT free."
- PCBs. The PCB NARAP provides a framework for environmentally sound management and control of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that will lead to their virtual elimination from the North American environment.
- Mercury. The goal of this NARAP is to reduce North American levels of mercury in the environment due to anthropogenic sources through some 85 individual action items under six major categories.

Two other NARAPs are nearing or have been completed:

- Dioxins, furans and hexachlorobenzene. This NARAP, currently undergoing review, will focus on capacity building, monitoring, and development of waste management strategies.
- Environmental monitoring and assessment. This NARAP was approved by the CEC Council in 2002. It will provide a forum, a framework and mechanisms to improve trilateral collaboration in the planning and implementation of monitoring, modeling and research programs in support of the SMOC initiative.

While the chemical-by-chemical approach will continue to be important to the SMOC initiative, the consideration of clusters or groups of chemicals, and specific industrial sectors or industrial complexes will be given greater attention in the future.



Identifying candidate substances for regional action plans

A process for identifying substances for regional action under the SMOC initiative has been developed. The selection criteria for new substances include scientific parameters such as toxicity, persistence, bioavailability, and bioaccumulation or bioconcentration of the substance in biota. It also emphasizes the importance of expert judgement and a number of socio-economic factors such as the potential for mutual benefits by all three countries as a result of action.

The Council identified lindane as a candidate for development of a regional action plan in June of 2002. A Lindane Task Force is formed and begin development of the NARAP.

Lead is currently being evaluated in accordance with the approved process.

Public consultation

The CEC places a high priority on providing opportunities for expert, public and stakeholder input to the Sound Management of Chemicals initiative. Meaningful public comment and stakeholder input have been, and will continue to be, important to the development of NARAPs.

The CEC makes extensive use of its web site to make SMOC reports and decisions and other documents related to various SMOC initiatives widely available to the public and stakeholders for information and comment. In addition SMOC has at least two public meetings per year to review progress. This practice helps to ensure SMOC's transparency and accountability.

Structure

The SMOC is overseen by a working group made up of two official members from each of the three countries. The working group generally meets twice a year, and reports directly to the CEC Council, which is composed of cabinet level or equivalent representatives from Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The Sound Management of Chemicals Initiative in 2002, and beyond

Reports on the implementation of the first four NARAPs have been prepared and are being used as part of a review and evaluation of the Sound Management of Chemicals initiative currently being conducted. This, in turn, will be used in the development of a five-year plan outlining strategic priorities for the future, with a particular emphasis on activities related to the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants that was signed by more than 100 countries in May 2001.

More information is available at: http://www.cec.org/programs_projects/pollutants_health/smoc/

Meaningful public comment and stakeholder input have been, and will continue to be, important to the development of NARAPs.



© USDA



Commission for Environmental Cooperation of North America
393, rue St-Jacques Ouest, bureau 200, Montréal (Québec) Canada H2Y 1N9
Tel: (514) 350-4300
Fax: (514) 350-4314
info@ccemtl.org • www.cec.org