

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION
Sectoral Activities Programme

**Background information for developing
an ILO policy framework for hazardous
substances**

Document for discussion at the
**Meeting of Experts to Examine Instruments, Knowledge,
Advocacy, Technical Cooperation and International
Collaboration as Tools with a view to Developing a
Policy Framework for Hazardous Substances**

Geneva, 2007

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACC	American Chemistry Council
ACGIH	American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
BOELVs	binding occupational exposure limit values
CASR	Chemical Abstracts Service Registry
CEN	European Committee for Standardization
CETDG	Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods
CICAD	concise international chemical assessment documents
COSHH	control of substances hazardous to health
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EHC	environmental health criteria
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GFAs	global framework agreements
GHS	Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals
GPS	Global Product Strategy
HPV	high production volume
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICCA	International Council of Chemical Associations
ICCS	International Conference on Chemical Safety
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions
ICSC	International Chemical Safety Card
IDLH	immediately dangerous to life and health
IGOs	intergovernmental organizations
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-OSH 2001	<i>ILO Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems</i>
IOE	International Organisation of Employers
IOELVs	indicative occupational exposure limit values
IOHA	International Occupational Hygiene Association

IOMC	Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals
IPCS	International Programme on Chemical Safety
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
MNE Declaration	ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
NIOSH	National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
NOSHC	Nanoparticle Occupational Safety and Health Consortium
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OELs	occupational exposure limits
OSH	occupational safety and health
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
OSH–MS	occupational safety and health management systems
RC	Responsible Care
REACH	registration, evaluation, authorization and restriction of chemicals
RTDG	Recommendations on transport of dangerous goods
SAICM	Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
SCEGHS	Subcommittee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
TLVs	threshold limit values
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNRTDG	United Nations Recommendations on transport of dangerous goods
VI	voluntary initiative
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

1. Within the general context of International Labour Organization (ILO) action in the area of occupational safety and health (OSH), the protection of workers from exposure to hazardous substances has always been a major concern for the ILO since it was founded in 1919, both in terms of standard setting and technical assistance to the tripartite constituents. Furthermore, current international, regional and national actions related to the sound management of chemicals illustrate the continued importance of this concern. The ILO has been, and continues to be, a major actor in international forums focusing on chemical safety, and ensuring that the views of its tripartite constituents are taken into account in the ongoing activities aimed at developing a global system for the sound management of chemicals.
2. At its 292nd Session (March 2005), the Governing Body decided that a “Meeting of Experts to Examine Instruments, Knowledge, Advocacy, Technical Cooperation and International Collaboration as Tools with a view to Developing a Policy Framework for Hazardous Substances” would be held under the auspices of the ILO’s Sectoral Activities Programme during the 2006–07 biennium.¹ The purpose of the Meeting, as decided by the 297th Session (November 2006) of the Governing Body, was to discuss how ILO instruments and other tools concerning OSH and hazardous substances could be best incorporated into a new policy framework and action plan. The Meeting could also examine best practices and appropriate national legal frameworks to promote safe and healthy working environments; review the roles of governments, and employers’ and workers’ organizations; and examine ways of establishing tripartite consultation mechanisms on OSH, and of ensuring that workers and their organizations participate in the consultation mechanisms and thereby build a preventive safety and health culture at work. The Meeting should also consider the impact of new and ongoing initiatives related to hazardous substances, including the UN-wide Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). The Meeting could adopt recommendations that would be the basis for subsequent ILO action.²
3. At its 297th Session (November 2006), the Governing Body decided that the Governments of the following 12 countries would be invited to nominate experts to participate in the Meeting in their personal capacity: Australia, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States; the Governments of Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela were placed on a reserve list to nominate an expert if any of the governments in the first list declined to do so. It was also decided that the participants at the Meeting would include 12 experts nominated after consultation with the Employers’ group and 12 after consultation with the Workers’ group of the Governing Body.³
4. In view of the above, this background paper prepared by the Office suggests that this Meeting of Experts should also take into account major ongoing international, regional and

¹ GB.292/13(Rev.).

² GB.297/15(Rev.).

³ GB.297/15.

national activities in the environmentally sound management of chemicals, particularly the ILO's Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health and the proposed revision of standards related to single substances,⁴ the new Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187),⁵ and the implementation of the Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS).⁶

5. The present document therefore presents, in a summary format, current action, issues and instruments relating to the sound management of hazardous substances. It provides an overview of the key aspects related to the prevention of exposure to hazardous substances, emerging hazards, a summary of related ILO and international standards and instruments, ongoing national, regional and international action, the role and impact of social dialogue, and proposes possible elements for developing an ILO policy framework and plan of action on hazardous substances. Its purpose is to provide a basis for discussions at the Meeting, as participants consider how, within the context of ILO standards and activities concerning OSH, the management of hazardous substances can be harmonized within the present international and regional frameworks for the sound management of chemicals. The conclusions of this Meeting of Experts will assist the ILO in further focusing its action to fulfil its long-standing international and inter-agency commitments in this area.

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