

Press Release No. 76/2009

Press Relations Officer: Martin Ittershagen
PR-staff: Anke Döpke, Dieter Leutert,
Fotini Mavromati, Theresa Pfeifer, Martin Stallmann
Address: Postfach 1406, 06813 Dessau-Roßlau
Telephone: +49 340/21 03-2122, -2827, -2250, -2318, -3927, -2507
E-Mail: pressestelle@uba.de
Internet: www.umweltbundesamt.de



The United Nations – together for global chemicals management

International SAICM programme for global security in production, use and disposal of chemicals

Protecting the environment against harmful influences such as chemicals would not be possible without the United Nations. Under the auspices of the UN Environmental Programme, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) was adopted in 2006. Its objective is to foster safer management of chemicals worldwide. 24 October 2009 marks the 64th anniversary of the entry-into-force of United Nations Charter—an occasion to pay tribute to the role that the United Nations plays in global environmental protection.

As an international treaty which includes 192 member states, the United Nations-- in addition to its main organs (the General Assembly and the Security Council)- has 22 other agencies, of which one is the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). UNEP was initiated by UN resolution in 1972 with a mandate to develop political instruments of successful environmental protection. The progress made in past decades has met with recognition worldwide, which is why the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) also supports the political call to accord the UNEP the status of an autonomous UN organisation and develop into the United Nations Environmental Organisation (UNEO). Some of the key international treaties on the protection of the global environment in effect today were drawn up under the UNEP. They are, to name a few, the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol aimed at combating global warming, and the 2001 Stockholm Convention for the regulation of persistent chemicals that bio-accumulate in the food chain.

SAICM complements existing treaties on chemicals safety that govern a limited number of substances with certain properties (for example: the Stockholm Convention or the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal). SAICM takes a multi-sectoral approach to establishing the principles of safe management of all chemicals. Global initiatives on chemicals management are compiled, coordinated, pooled, and implemented with the cooperation of many stakeholders (e.g. non-governmental organisations, lobbyists, pressure groups).

Chemical products are a part of our daily lives, yet we quite often dispose of too little information about the chemical ingredients in individual products or their impact on health and the environment. Global chemicals trade requires an international agreement on their

management for the sake of safeguarding the environment and health. Common rules and principles can also help to sell products on global markets and to lower trade barriers. Countries with no chemicals management system of their own in place up to now could draw on recommendations and orientation in the development of their national regulation. The Federal Environment Agency plays an active role in the development of such recommendations, makes information publicly available, and communicates the goals of SAICM to stakeholders in Germany.

Just how important international chemicals management is is illustrated in the words of Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency: "A number of hazardous chemicals spread quickly via air and water and threaten ecosystems and people in faraway places. Through trade chemical products are distributed throughout the world, and Germany is a global leader in chemicals production. Chemical safety is therefore not only a national issue, it calls for international cooperative effort."

An intergovernmental conference of SAICM held in Geneva in May 2009 addressed four emerging policy issues of international urgency: hazardous chemicals in non-regulated articles, chemicals in electronic waste, lead paint in consumer goods such as toys, and the pros and cons of new nanomaterials. UBA, too, will seek to improve the exchange of information and promote cooperative efforts between industrialised and developing countries.

More information about SAICM is available here:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/chemikalien-e/saicm.htm>

Dessau-Roßlau, 23 October 2009