



Recommendation of the Council on
the Assessment of the Potential
Environmental Effects of
Chemicals

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Date(s)

Adopted on 14/11/1974
Abrogated on 12/07/2017

THE COUNCIL,

HAVING REGARD to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

HAVING REGARD to the Recommendation of the Council of 26 May 1972 on Guiding Principles concerning International Economic Aspects of Environmental Policies [C(72)128];

CONSIDERING the need for concerted action amongst OECD Member countries to protect man and his environment from exposure to hitherto non-regulated, hazardous chemicals;

CONSIDERING the possibility of acceptance by one Member country of the results of assessments of chemicals for environmental effects carried out in another, in accordance with the aims of the United Nations Environment Programme;

CONSIDERING the importance of international trade in chemicals and chemical products;

On the proposal of the Environment Committee;

I. RECOMMENDS that the Governments of Member countries should make all efforts to ensure, in the interest of human well-being and environmental protection:

- a) That import, manufacturing and sales statistics, as appropriate, be kept of chemicals and chemical products;
- b) That Member countries, taking account of the attached Explanatory Note, and in particular paragraph 8, identify and further develop procedures that may be used to assess the potential effects on the environment of chemicals and chemical products;
- c) That prior to marketing of chemicals and chemical products their potential effects on man and his environment be assessed.

II. INSTRUCTS the Environment Committee to examine the feasibility of greater collaboration and harmonization in respect of national assessment and to submit proposals to the Council on how this might be achieved.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

1. The intent of the Recommendation is to encourage concerted approaches in OECD Member countries towards the prevention of unintentional effects of chemicals in the environment by advance assessment of their impact potential. This is considered essential in view of the intensive use of chemicals, the number of which is increasing every year.
2. It is the agreed opinion of the Sector Group on Unintended Occurrence of Chemicals in the Environment that in order to avoid the inadvertent liberation of harmful chemicals, their hazardous nature must be identified to enable the advantages and disadvantages of their use to be assessed and appropriate regulatory action to be taken.
3. Attempting to achieve this is a logical extension of already established controls over chemicals that are intended to be administered to man himself, i.e. pharmaceutical products, and, more recently, food additives. Similarly, certain controls are being exercised over chemicals that are likely to come into contact with man, such as animal feeds, pesticides and detergents.
4. The focus of the present Recommendation is on the protection of man and his environment. The presence of a chemical in the environment may adversely affect man by chronically exposing him to the chemical or by causing the deterioration of materials and biological systems which are beneficial to his survival. Contamination of the environment by cumulative pollutants is of particular concern due to the insidious nature of the process and the difficulty of correcting any damage that may have occurred.
5. There is international agreement already on the urgency of action in this field. The need for "awareness and advance warning of deleterious effects of man-made pollutants" was recognised as of priority importance by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. Recommendation No. 74 particularly calls for improved international acceptability of procedures for testing pollutants and contaminants by: "development of international schedules of tests for evaluation of the environmental impact potential of specific contaminants or products. Such a schedule of tests should include consideration of both short-term and long-term effects of all kinds, and should be reviewed and brought up to date from time to time to take into account new knowledge and techniques."
6. Since the membership of the OECD includes several countries which are among the largest producers of chemicals, a collaborative effort within the OECD would be particularly valuable. International collaboration is also appropriate at the present time, since a number of Member countries are in the process of extending their legislation to include control over environmentally harmful chemicals.
7. Chemicals are intensively traded, and clearly, mutual acceptance between Member countries of the results of national assessments would ensure proper control without unnecessary impediments to trade and industrial development in the countries directly involved, or proliferation of hazardous products into other countries. Such a mutual acceptance would also facilitate international exchange of data, thereby contributing to economic efficiency.
8. Subjecting large numbers of chemicals to a variety of tests for environmental effects as an additional phase in the development process, will necessarily make a demand on technical as well as financial resources. It is, therefore, important that full-scale testing be applied selectively. This calls for a selection mechanism to single out, at an early stage, those chemicals that require full-scale assessment.
9. Bearing in mind the limitations in resources, existing techniques must be efficiently employed, both in selection and assessment. A first step is an international survey of appropriate procedures available concerning all aspects of the assessment of chemicals for their potential environmental effects.

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