



FORUM V
Chemical Safety
for Sustainable Development
IFCS
Budapest, Hungary
25-29 September 2006

Plenary Information/Discussion Session on Tools and Approaches for Applying Precaution in the Context of Chemicals Safety

Information Request for Background Paper

Dear Colleague,

A Forum V Plenary Open Information/Discussion Session has been organized to advance open dialogue and understanding about how precaution is applied in practice with regards to chemical safety to protect health and environment and implementation of goals identified in IFCS declarations and recommendations and the SAICM Overarching Policy Strategy (OPS). A Forum V Thought Starter paper presents the rationale, objectives and organization of the session.¹

Through a series of practical case examples, the session will explore tools and approaches for applying precaution in chemical safety decision-making as well as commonalities and differences in these approaches. Following these presentations, guided discussion with delegates will occur, with the goal of identifying some key commonalities and differences in approaches and providing practical next steps for the future.

To ensure adequate thinking occurs in individual countries before the start of Forum V and thoughtful discussion at the Forum, an Information Background Document will be provided to delegates in advance of Forum V. This Backgrounder Document will summarize information collected on how governments and other organizations domestically apply precaution in chemicals management including:

- A collection of structured information requested from governments and organizations to provide examples of tools and frameworks for how they have applied precaution in the context of domestic chemicals safety efforts.
- Interviews with selected active members in IFCS to understand differences in how precaution is applied and some of the controversies in its application; how they are applying precaution in chemicals management including tools and approaches and the types of tools and processes that would support precautionary decision-making in the context of chemicals management.

¹ Thought Starter: Forum V Plenary Open Information/Discussion Session On Tools And Approaches For Applying Precaution In The Context Of Chemicals Safety, Prepared By: Forum Standing Committee (IFCS/FORUM-V/01-TS
http://www.who.int/ifcs/documents/forums/forum5/meet_docs/en/index.html)

Information Request

The purpose of this structured information collection process is to collect examples of tools, approaches and frameworks for applying precaution (or making decisions in the face of uncertainty) with regards to national chemical safety efforts. The goal is to understand similarities and differences in how precautionary decisions (or decisions in circumstances of uncertainty) are made across countries; what tools and approaches countries use to apply precaution in chemicals management; how policy, regulatory and scientific processes support precautionary decision-making in the context of chemicals management; the challenges and needs for applying precaution in the context of chemicals management; and varying perceptions with its application.

This information will be collected via the template questionnaire (Annex) which consists of specific and more open-ended questions. We ask that you fill in the template as thoroughly as possible. *Please provide any links or additional supporting materials that provide information on particular policies, tools, or activities.*

Process of soliciting information

The request for information submissions is being sent to the entire IFCS mailing list. Submissions are welcomed from everyone and government staff are encouraged to coordinate submissions through the IFCS National Focal Point (see IFCS website for list of designated NFP: <http://www.who.int/ifcs/focalpoints/en/>).

We ask that submissions be returned by **20 July 2006**. Please return completed form to:

IFCS Secretariat
Email: ifcs@who.int
Fax: +41 22 791 4875

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this important effort.

Sincerely,

Joel A. Tickner, ScD
Special Advisor, IFCS
Email: joel_tickner@uml.edu

Judy A. Stober, PhD
Executive Secretary, IFCS
Email: ifcs@who.int

Annex

IFCS Forum V
Plenary Information/Discussion Session on Tools and Approaches for
Applying Precaution in the Context of Chemicals Safety
Information Request for Background Paper
Structured Questionnaire

Background Information

Country: Austria

Ministry/Agency/Institute/Organization: Ministry for Environment

Contact Person: Michael Wittmann

Contact Details:

Mailing address:

Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und
Wasserwirtschaft
Abteilung V2
Stubenbastei 5
1010 Wien
Austria

Email: michael.wittmann@lebensministerium.at

For telephone and fax numbers, please indicate country and city codes:

Tel : +431 51522 2334

Fax : +431 51522 7334

Please submit completed questionnaire by 20 July 2006 to:

IFCS Secretariat
Email: ifcs@who.int
Fax: +41 22 791 4875

Please note: Unless you indicate otherwise in your response, these submissions will be posted on the IFCS website.

Please provide any links or additional supporting materials that provide additional information on particular policies, tools, or activities.

National chemicals policy or management:

1. How is the concept of precaution explicitly or implicitly (in terms of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty) incorporated in national chemicals policy or management in your country/organization?

Please check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| In the country constitution ? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In legislation? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| In agency/ministry/organization policy? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| In specific guidance documents for risk assessment or risk management? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Applied in specific cases but no particular policy? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not applied at all? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please provide greater detail (1 para).

The concept of precaution is explicitly mentioned in the general aims of the Austrian Chemical Substances Act, and also in the paragraphs concerning classification of substances. It can (or has to) be applied in all measures based upon the Austrian Chemical Substances Act, like bans or restrictions of the production, marketing or use of Chemicals. The concept of precaution is the leading principle of the Environment Ministry's Chemicals policy.

Tools and approaches for applying precaution:

2. What are some of the key tools and approaches used by your country/organization in applying precaution (or making decisions in circumstances of uncertainty) in the context of chemicals safety?

bans and restrictions of the production, marketing or use of Chemicals

- a. Is there a defined approach to applying precaution or decision-making under uncertainty?

Yes No

If yes, can you outline the elements of that approach or provide references to it?

- b. Is precaution integrated in other decision-making processes, tools and approaches such as;

Please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Data collection? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Prioritization of substances for risk management actions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Uncertainty characterization? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Socio-economic analysis (e.g., social impact, proportionality/cost-benefit assessment, trade concern)? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Risk assessment and risk management options? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Screening, comparison of alternatives, informed substitution? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Stakeholder and Public involvement? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

For those boxes checked, please briefly provide greater detail or links to additional information.

The tools checked above are certainly part of the decision-making process for taking measures based upon the Chemical Substances Act. Full scientific certainty is not a requirement.

c. How are gaps in knowledge addressed?

Please check all that apply.

- o Though conservative risk assessment assumptions
- o Through safety factors
- o Through modeling techniques
- o Through an assumption that lack of information is indication of potential harm
- o Through requesting additional research
- o Gaps are not addressed

For those boxes checked, please briefly provide greater detail or links to additional information.

The methods checked above are common practice when determining threshold values.

3. Please provide details of a particular case (or example) where precaution was applied (or decisions made in the face of uncertainty) in the context of chemicals management?

a. What stimulated/initiated the precaution process/action?

Please check all that apply.

- o Government concern over hazards and/or exposures
- o Stakeholder concerns over the particular threat
- o International policy requirements/pressures
- o Negative impacts/experience(s) from not acting on a previous chemical risk
- o Other

For those boxes checked, please briefly provide greater detail or links to additional information.

Case: ban of scented or coloured lamp oils for consumers.

Stimulated by concerns over evidence of accidents, some of which resulted in deaths of small children.

b. What process was used to make the decision? (please briefly describe the process or tools used to make the decision)

Risk assessment, socio-economic evaluation

c. Were there positive or negative impacts of this process/action?

Please check all that apply.

<u>Positive</u>		<u>Negative</u>	
Ecological or Health benefits	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ecological or health impacts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Economic impacts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved government/industry image	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Substitutes/alternatives did not work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved government/public morale	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Negative public reaction	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improvements to scientific tools/decision processes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other?	<input type="checkbox"/>		

For those boxes checked, please briefly provide greater detail or links to additional information.

A conspicuous decline of accidents.
Positive feedback from stakeholders and public.

d. Were there any unintended consequences from this process/action?

no

4. Are there any particular cases in your country/organization where precaution was not applied (decisions not made in the face of uncertain chemical risks) resulting in adverse impacts?

Yes No

If yes, briefly describe if and how decision-making processes have been modified as a result.

5. Does your government have processes in place to re-examine decisions made based on precaution or made in the face of uncertainty as additional data are available?

Yes No

If yes, briefly describe the process and how this process may be used to modify decisions, decision-making process, or tools.

Permanent evaluation and monitoring if the evidence upon which measures were based is still valid.

Lessons Learned from applying precaution in chemicals management

6. What are some of the biggest challenges to your country's (organization's) application of precaution in the context of chemicals management or in chemicals management decision-making in the face of uncertainty?

Please check all that apply.

- Scientific capacity
- Lack of scientific information
- Legal challenges
- Technical challenges
- Financial challenges
- Trade Challenges
- Other?

For those checked boxes, please briefly indicate what were the implications of these barriers and how have they been addressed or if not yet addressed, how could they be addressed?

Legal/Political context: For bans or restrictions of chemicals the Minister of the Environment needs the agreement of the Minister of the Economy

Are these challenges also applicable to decision-making and actions regarding established risks?

Yes No

Next steps

7. What are the most important needs of your country or organization for more effectively applying precaution (or making decisions in the face of uncertainty) and overcoming barriers in chemicals management decision-making?

Please check all that apply.

- Data on chemical toxicity/risks
- Tools for prioritization
- Tools for risk assessment
- Decision-making tools/frameworks
- Technical assistance in risk assessment processes
- Technical assistance in risk management processes
- Financial support for implementation
- International dialogue
- Information sharing to facilitate understanding of the issues
- Other

For those boxes checked, please briefly provide greater detail or links to additional information.

There is no agreed methodology to evaluate risk and hazard aspects against each other.

8. Briefly describe your perceptions as to some of the concerns regarding application of precaution in the context of chemicals safety?

Please briefly provide details or links to additional information.

There is no agreed societal consensus about the legitimacy of precautionary measures. Ideology of Sound Science.

-
9. Do you have any additional information on tools and approaches for applying precaution that would be helpful to inform discussion?
Please provide any additional materials or web links.

Please note: Unless you indicate otherwise in your response, your submission and those of others will be posted on the IFCS website.