



**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**

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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 Background 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.who.int/ifcs/documents/forums/forum5/meet_docs/en/index.html) )

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## 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](mailto: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](mailto:joel_tickner@uml.edu)

Judy A. Stober, PhD  
Executive Secretary, IFCS  
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## 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: Hungary

Ministry/Agency/Institute/Organization: Fodor József National Center for Public Health

Contact Person: Dr. Zoltán Szabó Act. Director General  
Contact Details:

Mailing address:  
1437 Budapest, POB 839

Email: szabozoltan@fjokk.hu

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

Tel : 36-1-476-1136 Fax : 36-1-215-6891

**Please submit completed questionnaire by 20 July 2006 to:**

**IFCS Secretariat**  
**Email: [ifcs@who.int](mailto: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.**

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*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 checked="" 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).

Act LIII of 1995 on the General Rules of Environmental Protection employs the principle of "precaution" as decisions and measures necessary for the reduction of environmental risks and the prevention or reduction of environmental damage in the future. Remarkably the Act established a link to Acts on hazardous substances and industrial disasters; thereby the principle was to be extended to those areas too.

The Technical Guidance Document of the European Commission is used for assessment of risk, which applies the concept of precaution.

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**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?

The key tools and approaches used in Hungary correspond to that of the EC.

- 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?

(see above)

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

*Please check all that apply.*

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

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

The above tools and processes are used or employed by the government agencies and authorities which comply with the legal rules, yet enforce principles as well.

c. How are gaps in knowledge addressed?

*Please check all that apply.*

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

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

- Risk assessment is mainly carried out by the NPHMOS, the National Institute of Chemical Safety (NICS) and the National Institute of Environmental Health (NIEH) of the Fodor József National Centre for Public Health
- Safety factors are controlled by the relevant ministries and the NPHMOS
- Authorities may refuse applications in case of lack of information.
- Additional research is carried out at the relevant departments of the National Institute of Environmental Health.

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.*

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

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

Permission of a plant protection product containing paraquat was cancelled by the authority in the 1970s.

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

Frequent registration of self-poisoning by this product inspired the authority to the withdrawal of the permit.

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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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Improved government/industry image	<input type="checkbox"/>	Substitutes/alternatives did not work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Improved government/public morale	<input 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.

The lethal incidences due to misuse of this pesticide were greatly reduced. The producer of the product suffered losses due to ban of marketing.

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

Positive  – please describe

Negative  - please describe

- 
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.

Construction materials containing asbestos were produced, marketed and used until 2004 despite the hazardous properties of asbestos was already well known. Legislation to ban on asbestos - in line with the EC legislation - was justified by scientific information.

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.

Re-examination of the decisions is a basic right of the authorities having competency on environmental licensing, disaster prevention, chemical safety, or granting permit for plant protection and biocidal products.

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**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?

- Any decision based on the precaution is preceded by a comparison of costs and benefits, therefore financial conditions may offer an obstacle.
- Interpretation of the legal rules by the industry may lead to avoid application of precaution.

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

Yes  No

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## 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.

Training of decision-makers and supervisors is needed in order to encourage them for applying the principle of precaution within the legal limitations.

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.*

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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.**