WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network

Business Plan

Version: 14 June 2013

Background

The production and use of chemicals continues to increase worldwide and manufacturing and trade of finished products has become more globalized; production has also shifted from developed to less developed countries. Therefore, to protect human health around the world and contribute to the improvement of health in developing nations, it is important to enhance efforts globally and share expertise to assess and manage the risks associated with exposure to these chemicals in the environment, food, products and occupational settings, as principled in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). Further highlighting the need for organizations to work more closely together to mutually and maximally benefit from activities of risk assessment and research programs are the increasing pressures on regulatory agencies to accelerate the rate of assessment of chemicals and the rapidly expanding nature and quantity of data available to support chemical risk assessment.

The health sector priorities for SAICM include actions to improve ability to access, interpret and apply scientific knowledge, filling gaps in scientific knowledge, development of globally-harmonized methods for chemical risk assessment and better methods to determine impacts of chemicals on human health.

In accordance with these priorities, WHO convened two meetings on Global Collaboration in Chemical Risk Assessment, the first held in Geneva in March 2010 and the second in Bonn in March 2012. These meetings endorsed the establishment of a WHO network to strengthen global collaboration in chemical risk assessment.

Goal and Objectives

The WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network (“the Network”) is an initiative whose overall goal is to improve chemical risk assessment globally through fostering and facilitating sustainable interaction between institutions on chemical risk assessment issues and activities.

The specific objectives of the Network are to:

a) Provide a forum for scientific and technical exchange;
b) Facilitate and contribute to capacity building;
c) Promote best practices and the harmonization of methodologies;
d) Assist in the identification of research needs and promote the application of new science in risk assessment practice;
e) Assist in the identification of emerging risks to human health from chemicals;
f) Share information about work programmes to avoid duplication of effort;
g) Upon request, assist WHO in the development of training and other materials in support of the above.

The Network is also an important means of contributing to implementation of the objectives outlined in SAICM.

Operational Aspects

Terms of Reference have been established to govern the work of the Network. As outlined in greater detail in the Terms of Reference, the Network is a WHO administered collaborative initiative comprised of institutions with expertise in human health risk assessment, including government and public health institutions, intergovernmental organizations, professional societies, WHO Collaborating Centres, non-governmental organizations in official relations with WHO, and others. Contributions to the Network may be in the form of financial support, in-kind input to Network projects, technical expertise or the sharing of information.

The Network aims to complement and coordinate with other relevant international collaborative risk assessment initiatives.

Network Participants will be invited to meet face-to-face approximately every two years to share experiences, evaluate progress and plan future activities, using other means of communication between meetings to maintain contact and sharing of information.

Scope, Nature and Selection of Network Activities

The Network is global in scope, encompassing all WHO Regions. It is intended to include participants from countries of all economic status, from least developed to middle and upper income countries. While the Network is global in nature, some activities undertaken as contributions to the Network may be more regional in focus, although the resulting benefits could be far-reaching.

The Network addresses issues related to the assessment of risks to human health associated with exposure to chemicals. This includes exposures to chemicals in environmental media (air, water, soil) and food, through use of consumer products and in occupational settings.

The work of the Network initially focuses principally on activities related to the thematic areas recommended by the March 2010 Meeting in Geneva and further supported by the March 2012 Meeting in Bonn; i.e., capacity building/training; chemical risk assessments/sharing knowledge; risk assessment methodology; and research, and encompasses relevant WHO activities already underway prior to the establishment of the Network.

The Network is project oriented. Deliverables or products of projects could be in form of a report, guidance documentation, training sessions or materials, tools, databases, etc.

Proposed projects are evaluated and prioritized based on the following aspects:

- Significant relevance of the project topic to Network themes and objectives
- The activity adds value to risk assessment globally
Strong or multiple linkages to other ongoing or recently completed projects
- High likelihood of project completion, including availability of adequate resources
- International or multi-country range of application of project outcome or product
- Benefit to the project and Network participants of implementation through the WHO Network versus another initiative.

**Network Priorities 2012-2014**

The priorities identified for 2012-2014 relate principally to the initial implementation phase of the Network, including engagement of participants in several new and ongoing short-term activities.

**Initial Implementation Phase of the Network:**

- **Operationalize the Network (2012-2013)**
  - Includes acquiring resources and logistics planning
- **Develop communication materials and approaches (2012-early 2013)**
  - Includes three main aspects: internal communications within the Network, external communications about the Network (i.e., promoting the network via WHO/IPCS home page, newsletter, use of “champions”, launch plan, etc.) and information sharing mechanisms (databases, etc.).
- **Convene the 1st Network meeting (2014, pending availability of resources)**
  - This meeting will, among other things, provide input for Network priorities post-2014.

**Thematic Area Activities:**

Initiate several new short-term projects and consolidate ongoing related WHO risk assessment activities into the Network aligned in the areas of:

- **capacity building/training**
  - including the development of an on-line database of chemical risk assessment training courses, tailoring training to specific audiences, promotion of WHO materials through workshops, professional society meetings and continuing education courses.
- **chemical risk assessments/sharing knowledge**
  - including production of WHO chemical risk assessment documents, sharing of work/project plans, establishing a mechanism for Network participants to call for experts (e.g., peer review)
- **risk assessment methodology, including**
  - mapping of WHO and select other international methodologies and tools
  - increasing harmonization and implementation of methodologies
  - production of WHO methodologies and tools, including:
    - Update of the WHO Mode of Action Framework (publication 2013)
    - WHO guidance on identifying early life stages for characterizing chemical exposures (publication 2013)
- **research**
  - identification and communication of research priorities, including:
Publication of article reviewing recommendations for research in past WHO chemical risk assessment publications

○ Mapping of ongoing activities related to toxicity testing in the 21st century and regional research relevant to risk assessment

Resourcing

The success and viability of the Network is dependent upon adequate resourcing, both financial and in-kind, during the initial start-up period and also over the long term to ensure that it meets the objectives outlined above and continues to provide maximum value to the human health chemical risk assessment community.

The envisioned needs (financial and in-kind) for the initial implementation phase of network and for long term support include:

- Network Operation:
  ○ Secretariat for Network, including running of the Network itself plus a number of WHO-led activities (maintained at 2011-2012 level of activity): 2.5 FTE (Approx. 700,000 USD per annum), with up to 1.0 FTE in kind.
  ○ Network meeting costs: Approximate cost, 80,000-100,000 USD depending on the number of participants requiring travel support (Next meeting proposed to be held in 2014).

- Project Related Costs:
  ○ Activity costs for Network, including network brochure, promotion, etc. Approximate estimate 20,000 USD p.a.
  ○ Activity costs for WHO led projects involving an expert meeting or workshop, publication costs, promotion costs: Approximate average cost p.a. per project: 60,000-80,000 USD, depending on the scope of meeting.
  ○ Activity costs for projects led by others, including preparation of drafts, consultation and finalization of products as contributions to the Network (varies with activity).

The WHO programme responsible for the Network relies on voluntary contributions for the majority of staff costs, and all activity costs. Potential sources of financial and in-kind contributions to WHO include: governments and governmental institutions; foundations meeting WHO donor requirements; NGOs in official relations with WHO; WHO Collaborating Centres.

The resource needs of Network participants will depend upon their existing funding arrangements and the type of activity implemented. Potential sources of funding and in-kind contributions for such activities include:

○ National and supra-regional authorities
○ Public health institutions
○ Scientific/professional societies
○ Non-governmental organizations
○ Cost recovery training
Expected Outcomes and Measures of Success

The expected outcomes of successful implementation of the Network will be enhanced collaboration between participants on issues related to human health risk assessment leading to increased capacity to conduct high quality risk assessments which incorporate harmonized methodology and emerging science as well as efficient and timely knowledge transfer.

The Network will be evaluated periodically to ensure continued success and sustainability. Potential indicators, that will be refined prior to the first evaluation cycle, include:

- Collaboration on risk assessment issues
  - Collaboratively developed products
  - Harmonization of risk assessment methodologies
  - Implementation of methodology in national and international risk assessment programs
  - New methodologies and tools incorporating emerging data and technologies

- Creation of information sharing mechanisms
  - Regular open communication between participants
  - High quality training materials and courses
  - Mechanisms to strengthen the interface between risk assessment and research

- Establishment and maintenance of sustainable Network administration
  - International awareness of the Network
  - Participant satisfaction
  - Extensive and growing list of participants (in number and geographical and economical distribution)
  - Sufficient and sustainable financial resourcing plan
  - Cooperation with international organizations at global and regional levels

Further Information:

Web site: [www.who.int/ipcs](http://www.who.int/ipcs)
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1 The timing of periodic evaluation will take into account the timing of meetings of the Network as well as future work planning cycles.