HARMONIZATION IMPROVES HEALTH RISK ASSESSMENT

HARMONIZATION establishes common principles, understanding and approaches and enhanced transparency in risk assessment, facilitating use for regulatory purposes. It promotes best practice science, & enhances the availability of chemical safety information globally, thereby reducing costs.

HARMONIZATION delivers SAFER CHEMICAL USE and SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT and promotes HEALTHY POPULATIONS

Contribution to the Achievement of International Commitments

The IPCS Harmonization Project enables governments and others to work towards the achievement of goals first outlined in Agenda 21 Chapter 19 in Rio in 1992 at the United

Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, adopted in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), recognized that assessing the risks to human health and the environment that a chemical may cause is a prerequisite to planning for its safe and beneficial use. However, it also recognized that risk assessment is resource-intensive and could be made cost-effective by strengthening international cooperation and better coordination, thereby making the best use of available resources and avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort. Chapter 19 called for improved methods for assessment of chemicals and a common framework for risk assessment, to enable decision makers to adopt adequate policies and measures to reduce risks posed by chemicals.

At WSSD governments renewed their commitment to Agenda 21 and made a commitment to "achieve, by 2020, that chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment, using transparent science-based risk assessment procedures and science-based risk management procedures...".

SAICM was developed to support the WSSD commitment. It elaborates detailed objectives and a Global Plan of Action, the implementation of which will contribute to the achievement of the WSSD commitment. The Harmonization Project contributes to the implementation of SAICM by addressing the SAICM objective on Risk Reduction and the Global Plan of Action activity to "Develop and use new and harmonized methods for risk assessment". In May 2006 the 59th World Health Assembly urged Member States to take full account of the health aspects of chemical safety in national implementation of the SAICM, and requested WHO to facilitate implementation by the health-sector of the Strategic Approach, focusing on human health-related elements.

Aims and Achievements

The Harmonization Project aims to harmonize global approaches to chemical risk assessment, including by developing international guidance documents on specific issues. The guidance is intended for adoption and use in countries and by international bodies in the performance of chemical risk assessments. The guidance is developed by engaging experts worldwide. The project has been implemented in a step-wise approach, first sharing information and increasing understanding of methods and practices used by various countries, identification of areas where convergence of different approaches would be beneficial, and then developing guidance that enables implementation of harmonized approaches. The Project uses a building-block approach focusing at any one time on the aspects of risk assessment that are particularly important for harmonization.
The Project enables risk assessments (or components thereof) to be performed using internationally accepted methods and these assessments can then be shared to avoid duplication and optimize use of valuable resources for risk management. It also promotes sound science as a basis for risk management decisions, promotes transparency in risk assessment, and reduces unnecessary testing of chemicals. Advances in scientific knowledge can be translated into new harmonized methods. International peer review of the methods promotes scientific integrity.

Further information can be found on the website at: http://www.who.int/ipcs/methods/harmonization/en/index.html