CropLife Africa Middle East

Representing the Plant Science Industry

Stockholm Convention

on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)

FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Stockholm Convention is a global treaty that came into force on 17-May-2004. It is designed to protect public health and the environment from the effects of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). These are chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods and are potentially toxic to humans and wildlife.

The plant science industry has an active involvement in the ongoing implementation of the Convention by providing expertise and data to the authorities to help develop regulations that will contribute to better protection of the environment.

This Convention established a global management process for chemicals that are persistent in the environment, toxic to a range of species, accumulate in fatty tissue and may be transported long distances (Persistent Organic Pollutants).

CropLife Perspective

Chemicals are listed as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the Convention because they have been shown to have persistent and bio-accumulative properties.

This does not necessarily mean they cannot be used safely and responsibly.

The crop protection industry supports the new guidelines for Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) to reduce unintentional use of POPs and manage POP waste.

While we support any initiative which provides a real improvement in human health or environmental protection, we believe that all decisions under this and other international treaties should be based on sound scientific evidence of risk.

Consistency and uniformity of application is also needed, balancing risks, benefits and socio-economic needs, which may vary from country to country.

What is the Convention?

The Convention sets out several objectives including:

- the elimination from commerce of identified POPs and others that may be identified in the future
- encouraging the transition in commerce to safer alternatives
- identifying additional POPs
- the clean-up of old stockpiles and equipment containing POPs; and
- encouraging all stakeholders to work towards a POP-free environment.

Several discontinued or little-used pesticides (including aldrin, heptachlor and DDT) are included in the first list of substances identified as POPs. As technology has developed, so have many of the older and more persistent products been replaced by newer, more effective ones. However, the fact that a chemical accumulates in fatty tissues and is persistent in the environment does not mean that it cannot be used safely and provide real benefits. A prime example is DDT, where the only proven problems relate to accumulation of very high levels in raptors, at the top of the food chain, when the pesticide was used very widely, in large quantities and in a largely uncontrolled way. In fact, when used at low levels as a residual indoor spray, it remains the most effective and cheapest anti-malarial treatment available, and has been reintroduced into a number of sub-Saharan African countries for that reason.

CropLife International has shown its support for the new guidelines for Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) that outline the ways of reducing unintentional POPs and managing POPs waste. We believe that an objective, evidence-based approach to risk management, through the framework of the Stockholm Convention, can deliver useful additional environmental protection. However, it must be used consistently and uniformly, taking account not just of risks but also benefits and socio-economic needs.

The Stockholm Convention and POPs Criteria

The screening criteria include identity, persistence, bio-accumulation, long-range transport and adverse effects. Any country that is a party to the Convention can submit a proposal to the secretariat for consideration.

All criteria must be met and be regarded as scientifically justified by the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) before it can accept a proposal to list a new chemical as a POP. Following acceptance of a proposal, a risk-benefit profile is prepared and possible control measures considered.

Depending on the risk profile and the risk management evaluation, the POPRC will recommend to the Conference of Parties (COP) whether the chemical should be subject to any controls. The COP formally makes the decision to list the chemical and specify its related control measure.

For further information, visit the following websites:

http://www.pops.int/

http://www.croplife.org/

http://www.unido.org/

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