

Conclusions of the OECD-FAO-UNEP Workshop on Obsolete Pesticides Alexandria, Virginia, USA, September 2000

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Background

This paper summarises the findings, barriers, opportunities, and recommendations from a workshop on unwanted or obsolete pesticides, a problem that affects almost all developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

The final workshop report is on the Web at www.oecd.org/ehs/pest/OPWrpt_final_x_.doc. The *Baseline Study on the Problem of Obsolete Pesticide Stocks*, prepared in advance of the workshop by Mark Davis from the Pesticide Action Network, is also on the Web at www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/AGRICULT/AGP/AGPP/Pesticid/

The workshop was organised by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Obsolete Pesticide Program, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) Chemicals Program, and the UNEP Secretariat of the Basel Convention. It was hosted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA). The workshop was held in Alexandria, Virginia, USA in September 2000.

Seventy people attended from 32 countries and included participation from key organisations like the European Commission, World Bank, Caribbean Environmental Health Institute, International HCH and Pesticide Association, Global Crop Protection Federation, and the Pesticide Action Network.

OECD, FAO, UNEP and U.S. EPA joined together in planning the Alexandria workshop in an effort to raise awareness, especially within the donor community, about the severity of the obsolete pesticide problem and to explore ways to augment and better co-ordinate current activities to address it, including the prevention of future accumulations of unwanted stockpiles.

The workshop was organised in alternating plenary and breakout sessions to address problem of obsolete stocks and its context, the barriers and opportunities for progress, and recommendations.

Workshop findings

Why is this issue important?

The workshop participants agreed that the problem of obsolete pesticides is very serious and that action is urgently needed to identify and secure or dispose of existing stocks and prevent the accumulation of new ones. The participants agreed that obsolete pesticide stocks not only present a hazard to public health, but can also contaminate natural resources and stand in the way of socio-economic development. The workshop participants elaborated on these issues, saying that obsolete pesticides:

- are a hazard to human health when unmanaged.
- can contaminate water sources.
- contribute to long-term contamination of soil and other natural resources.
- can lead to escalating costs if there is a delay in cleaning them up.
- can send a message that pesticides are the principal tool for pest control, perpetuating the problem.
- were a key motivation behind the global treaty on persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

Why was this workshop important?

This workshop linked key funding organisations with countries with first hand knowledge about the problems associated with unwanted pesticides. The participants agreed that solving the obsolete pesticide problem would, among other things,

- improve public health and environmental protection.
- enhance goals for socio-economic development.
- help developing countries move toward sustainable agriculture and vector management.
- provide a model and stimulus for proper management of other types of chemicals.

What are the causes of stockpile accumulation?

The workshop participants identified many causes for the accumulation of obsolete pesticide stockpiles in developing countries. These included:

- excessive or inappropriate pesticide donations made by aid agencies.
- large-scale procurement by developing country governments.
- lack of awareness of pesticide hazards.
- the need for proper pesticide management and storage.
- lack of a pesticide regulatory infrastructure.
- poor management and storage of pesticides.
- inappropriate policies and attitudes.
- delays in receiving pesticides (sometimes years long).
- lack of product quality control.
- unavailability of appropriate products, such as those with a long shelf life or sold in appropriate pack sizes.
- inappropriate marketing of pesticides.
- pesticide manufacturing or formulation plants that leave a legacy of stockpiles and contaminated land.

Barriers to prevent and eliminate stocks

The workshop participants agreed that the following factors make it difficult for developing countries to address the obsolete pesticide problem, and for aid agencies to help them do so:

- the general lack of awareness of the problem, which leads to its being given low priority politically.
- the sheer magnitude of the problem, making it a seemingly insurmountable task.
- a lack of infrastructure for regulating pesticides and overseeing their distribution, use and storage.
- aid agency procedures that are sufficiently difficult and time consuming to dissuade a developing country from applying for aid to clean up stockpiles.
- the difficulty of breaking old habits as a barrier for both parties.
- insufficient communication, co-ordination and collaboration between aid agencies and developing countries and other involved stakeholders.
- the lack of agreement on disposal techniques as a barrier for both developing countries and aid agencies.

Opportunities for preventing and eliminating obsolete stocks

The workshop participants identified various ways for countries and aid agencies to overcome the barriers and to create opportunities for preventing and eliminating obsolete pesticide stocks. These are as follows:

- raise awareness of the importance of cleaning up stocks and preventing new ones.
- take leadership for addressing the problem.
- make use of existing laws and conventions to create political will.
- use existing guidelines and codes of conduct to improve pesticide management.
- develop new guidelines or tools as needed.
- improve communication and information exchange about the problem and increase co-ordination and collaboration among all stakeholders.
- increase transparency of the trade and use of pesticides.
- address the disposal of existing stocks and prevention of new ones should be addressed as a single issue.

Workshop recommendations

The workshop participants agreed that all relevant stakeholders have shared responsibilities should address the obsolete pesticide problem worldwide. The recommendations are grouped by responsibility.

Developing countries

- assume leadership for addressing the country's problem of obsolete pesticide stocks.
- create an infrastructure for pesticide regulation and management.
- co-ordinate and educate the relevant stakeholders.

Pesticide donor countries and aid agencies

- recognise that prevention and disposal of obsolete pesticides is important to sustainable economic development.
- give higher priority to providing technical and capacity building assistance for pesticide management in developing countries.
- to the extent possible, fund and support relevant activities including disposal of obsolete pesticides.
- follow the relevant guidelines and principles developed by the OECD DAC when responding to requests for pesticide donations.
- collaborate with others.
- increase communication and information exchange about the problem, and make the issues "transparent" through vehicles such as web sites, a newsletter and a clearinghouse.

Pesticide industry (including the Global Crop Protection Federation, individual pesticide producers, retailers and distributors)

- take an active role in the effort to identify and dispose of existing stocks of obsolete and unwanted pesticides.
- contribute to the prevention of further obsolete stocks in the future.
- ensure that the promotion of chemical pesticides does not undermine national, regional or local efforts to reduce reliance on pesticides and to promote alternatives to chemicals in pest management.

Non-governmental organisations

- raise awareness about the problem of obsolete pesticides at all levels of society, from the grass roots to government.
- develop educational programs and encourage countries to develop strategies for the prevention of future accumulations of stockpiles.

International Organisations

- OECD Development Assistance Committee: Give higher priority to the issue of obsolete pesticides and their prevention and building on the 1995 DAC Guidelines for Aid Agencies on Pest and Pesticide Management.
- FAO: Give higher priority to the issue of obsolete pesticides and their prevention, and raise the status of this work to the FAO Program as approved by the Council of Ministers. Expand the FAO initiative to inventory and dispose of obsolete pesticides.
- UNEP Secretariat of the Basel Convention (SBC) and Chemicals Program: Give higher priority to the issue of obsolete pesticides and their prevention. Bring the subject into the agenda of the Governing Council of UNEP.
- OECD Working Group on Pesticides: periodically review progress in implementing the recommendations of this workshop.
- World Bank/United Nations Development Program: address the issue of obsolete pesticides, within the broader context of sustainable agriculture and waste management, in annual Consultative Group/Roundtable meetings.
- FAO, UNEP SBC, WHO and other international organizations: improve coordination and interaction on obsolete pesticide issues.

All organisations

- build a network for information sharing, co-ordination and collaboration on the obsolete pesticide problem, drawing on lessons learned.
- adhere to existing guidelines relevant to pesticide management.
- take responsibility for ensuring that all pesticides supplied are used, managed properly.

- clarify the impact of pesticides on human health and livelihood and the environment, and identify the links between these impacts and socio-economic development.
- explore mechanisms such as the POPs and Basel Conventions for raising awareness about and implementing solutions to the problem of obsolete pesticides.
- promote and strengthen existing training programs in pesticide management and disposal and create more programs where needed.
- highlight the issue internationally.

Conclusions

Representatives from OECD, FAO, UNEP, U.S. EPA, aid agencies, development banks, governments of countries with stocks, pesticide producers, and non-governmental organisations worked collaboratively during the Alexandria workshop to raise awareness about the problem of obsolete pesticides and make recommendations to dispose of existing stocks and prevent new ones. The recommendations were specifically targeted to each stakeholder group so that each would know what should be done to help solve the problem in the future.