

Obsolete pesticides stocks in Central and Eastern Europe

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Background

Following the transition to a market economy, many of the existing state farms and village co-operatives in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have ceased to function. One of the consequences of this development is that stocks of agricultural pesticides and other chemicals are often left under poor management conditions and sometimes completely uncontrolled, thereby posing a severe threat to human health and the environment.

In many CEE countries, the responsibility for these stocks lies with national or local governments, which often lack the technical and financial capacity to adequately handle this problem.

A successful pilot project in Hungary

In 1997, a successful small-scale pilot project was carried out to address this problem of chemical time bombs. The project was carried out in close collaboration between the local NGO Bakonyalja Environment and Tourist Organisation, the local community of Ácsteszér and with the support of the Dutch Ministry of the Environment, and the Dutch DOEN foundation. The objectives of this pilot project were:

1. Handling one particularly dangerous stock as a matter of urgency.
2. While at the same time answering two questions:
 - a) can these stocks be handled adequately in Hungary?
 - b) what is the size of this problem in Hungary?

One of the elements of the pilot project was to identify the possibilities to handle the obsolete stocks in the region. The Dutch Ministry of the Environment assessed the technical data of an incinerator in the Hungarian town of Dorog for compliance with international standards. A specialised company was contracted that packed and transported the obsolete pesticides and the old packaging material in special containers from the location to the incinerator.

Every step of the process was covered by local and national media, thus realising nation-wide attention for the problem of obsolete pesticides. Following the broadcast on national television, the Bakonyalja Environment and Tourist Organisation sent a questionnaire to each of the 3,200 local communities in Hungary to inquire about similar stocks in their territory. The local and national authorities as well as NGOs were kept informed of the steps of this project.

The results of this pilot project were that:

1. The urgent stock of obsolete pesticides was cleared, thereby 1) avoiding contamination of drinking water of a rural community and 2) demonstrating that this type of stocks can be handled in Hungary.
2. Over 1,300 replies were received to the questionnaire, indicating that there are at least over 300 similar and often much larger stocks of obsolete pesticides.
3. The pilot project demonstrated that with the active involvement of all stakeholders, inventories of stocks of obsolete pesticides can be made in a relatively short period.

A feasibility study by the Dutch Government

In addition to the abovementioned example of a successfully carried out pilot project, several different national and bilateral actions have been initiated to address the problem of obsolete pesticides stocks.

The initiatives carried out thus far show that:

- stocks of obsolete pesticides in CEE countries are a serious but manageable problem;
- the approaches in handling stocks of obsolete chemicals vary from country to country and from storage to storage;
- the way in which the problem has been addressed in CEE countries is often on an ad hoc basis and with financial and technical support from outside the country;
- crucial to the success of addressing the problem are 1) political will of the national level and local authorities and 2) the involvement of all stakeholders.

In order to make optimal use of the limited technical and financial resources available within and outside the CEE region, it is imperative that:

- 1) there is **political will** to address the problem in collaboration with **all stakeholders**;
- 2) a **systematic approach** is followed in which per country an inventory is made of the stocks of obsolete chemicals and of the technical, logistical and financial possibilities to handle stocks in that country;
- 3) a **regional approach** is followed in which activities in the different countries are well **co-ordinated**.

With a view to assisting the CEE countries in finding a systematic and regional approach towards the problem of obsolete chemicals, the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment carried out a six months feasibility study on obsolete pesticides in the period September 1, 2000 - March 1, 2001.

The objective of this feasibility study was to assist CEE countries in developing a systematic, co-ordinated approach towards obsolete pesticides, by identifying and, where possible, making available the technical, logistical and financial possibilities to address this problem.

The feasibility study focused on two demonstration countries: Hungary and the Slovak Republic.

The feasibility study resulted in the following **products**:

- Compilation of resource documents

The objective of this part of the project was to collect and make available existing technical and legal information on obsolete pesticides. The main focus thereby was on technical manuals, such as manuals, which enable countries to make inventories of stocks of obsolete pesticides and manuals that describe different technical possibilities of handling obsolete pesticides. In addition, the compilation contains information on pesticides and chemical substances in general, as well as relevant (EU)-regulation concerning hazardous waste and pesticides and the texts of relevant international conventions.

- Matrix of funds

The matrix of funds is a document in which funding entities are listed that potentially can give financial support to environmental projects in Central and Eastern Europe. For each funding entity the matrix includes, among others, the type of activities for which applications can be submitted, the budget(s) available, the target countries, the criteria for eligibility, the procedure for application and the address. On March 19, 2001, there were 48 different funding entities listed in the matrix. Among the funding entities listed in the matrix there are several funds of the European Union and the European Commission as well as from other international organisations. Furthermore there is a number of funding entities identified within Central and Eastern Europe. Within the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment ideas on how to keep the matrix up to date and accessible via the internet are being discussed.

- Guidelines for project proposals

The guidelines for project proposals can be used by every person or organisation wanting to apply for funding. It offers first of all an overview of a large number of points of interest that have to be taken into account when writing a project proposal. This information is subtracted from eight different sources mostly found on the internet. Furthermore this information is completed with several other useful tips and possible pitfalls. The guidance document follows a step-by-step approach towards the process of writing a project proposal and selecting a funding entity. It furthermore identifies criteria and limitations for an eligible project proposal.

Follow-up in Slovakia and Hungary

Picking up the momentum created by the feasibility study, a number of involved NGOs, authorities and individuals in Hungary have met several times to discuss the possibilities for a follow-up. These discussions resulted in the following observations:

- Although the history and current situation with regard to obsolete pesticides are different in Hungary and Slovakia, these two countries are both confronted with several thousand stocks of obsolete pesticides for the handling of which at least partly a similar approach can be used.
- There is an urgent need to start with a structured approach toward the problem of obsolete pesticides using the tools provided by the Dutch feasibility study.
- Given the limited financial and technical resources available in both countries, use should be made of the excellent possibilities for collaboration between organisations and authorities in Hungary and Slovakia.

The Ipelska Union - a transboundary (Slovak-Hungarian) operating NGO - was identified as a possible host for the implementation of nation-wide inventory in Slovakia and Hungary. The Ipelska Union together with other organisations (NGOs, authorities, schools etc.) is currently preparing a project proposal to carry out co-ordinated, nation-wide inventories of obsolete pesticides stocks in both Slovakia and Hungary.

The objective of the project is to produce within 2 years detailed, nation wide inventories of obsolete pesticide stocks in Hungary and Slovakia, as a basis for follow-up disposal activities. The project is limited to inventories because, amongst others, meaningful decisions on prioritisation and most appropriate ways of disposal can only be taken when a detailed overview of the existing stocks and the conditions under which they are stored, is available.