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**Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention  
on the Control of Transboundary Movements of  
Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal**  
Sixth session  
Geneva, 3–7 September 2007  
Item 10 (e) of the provisional agenda\*  
**Strategic partnerships: asbestos**

## **Proposed workplan on the sound management of asbestos wastes with emphasis on measures to be taken in disaster-prone areas**

### **Note by the Secretariat**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. By its decision VIII/33 the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention adopted the programme and budget for the 2007–2008 biennium and agreed to include a new Strategic Plan focus area on mercury and asbestos wastes. For the asbestos programme, the Conference agreed that work should begin on the development of guidelines and training materials for the sound management of asbestos wastes with emphasis on measures to be taken in disaster-prone areas. The Basel Convention regional and coordinating centres should promote awareness among local residents and municipalities on the issue and develop pilot activities in the future. The Conference recognized the need to allocate \$200,000 under the Basel Convention Technical Cooperation Trust Fund Programme and budget for the biennium 2007–2008 for this purpose.
2. By its decision VIII/5 on the Basel Convention Partnership Programme, the Conference of the Parties adopted a Partnership Programme workplan for 2007–2008, which contained in its provisions on potential new partnership in 2007–2008 the development of a partnership on asbestos waste.
3. On 19 December 2006, a Regional Workshop for the Environmentally Sound Management of Asbestos-containing Materials was organized in Jakarta, by the Basel Convention Regional Centre for South East Asia, located there. The workshop, which was attended by representatives from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Maldives, was organized with a financial contribution from the UNEP Disaster Management Branch and the International Labour Organization (ILO), in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Basel Convention. The objective of that workshop was to raise awareness on environmentally sound management of asbestos in countries that were in the process of rebuilding and

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\* UNEP/CHW/OEWG/6/1/Rev.1.

rehabilitating following the devastating tsunami in December 2004, which greatly affected some parts of India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

4. At the workshop it was established that, according to the latest available information, \$19 million worth of chrysotile was imported into Indonesia in 2004 and imports had increased since then due to the tsunami. There were other chemicals that could be used as a substitute for asbestos such as cellulose, aramid, amosite and silica. By comparison with its substitutes chrysotile was the strongest fibre and relatively cheap, so it was quite difficult to replace it with other synthetic substances. It was noted that the idea of banning the import of asbestos had caused concern in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand; the ministries of the environment of those countries needed to aim to achieve sustainable development by balancing the provision of building materials with the need to safeguard against the impact of asbestos use on future generations.

5. A report on the Regional Workshop on Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes from Health Care and from Agriculture, organized by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and held in Jakarta from 26 to 29 June 2006, also highlighted the problems of post-tsunami clean-up of asbestos-containing materials.<sup>1</sup> It was noted that during the clean-up of damaged and destroyed buildings after the disaster, large quantities of asbestos-containing materials needed to be handled and disposed of. In early 2005, the WHO South East Asia Regional Office had issued guidance for the debris disposal. In addition, the Basel Convention Secretariat had also contributed to the guidance elements for hazardous waste management in tsunami affected areas.<sup>2</sup>

6. At its first meeting on 17 and 18 April 2007, the Expanded Bureau of the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties considered a document on the development of guidelines for the sound management of asbestos wastes with emphasis on measures to be taken in disaster-prone areas (UNEP/SBC/BUREAU/8/1/5), which had been prepared by the Secretariat. At that meeting, the Secretariat reported to the Expanded Bureau on the steps that it had taken to develop the guidelines and proposed pilot projects to address the new asbestos strategic plan focus area. The Bureau advised the Secretariat on the type of information on the development of the guidelines that it should provide to the Open-ended Working Group at its sixth session.

## **II. Implementation**

### **A. Issues regarding asbestos management**

7. At the Regional Workshop held in Jakarta on 19 December 2006, the UNEP Disaster Management Branch highlighted the following issues and needs regarding asbestos management based on findings from the tsunami in 2004:

(a) Little or no asbestos waste clean-up programmes had been initiated despite the presence of widespread asbestos debris in disaster areas;

(b) Reuse of asbestos waste in reconstruction was widespread, despite prohibitions from a number of international donors (including Australia and the United Kingdom). In fact, asbestos use was promoted by reconstruction agencies in, for instance, Sri Lanka;

(c) Pressure for building materials may result in accelerated importation of asbestos;

(d) Hazardous asbestos wastes had been generated in recent Asian disasters in, for example, the Yogyakarta and Bantul area, where 303,000 houses were damaged beyond repair by earthquakes in areas where the use of asbestos cement sheeting was widespread;

(e) There was a general lack of awareness about asbestos on the part of the general public and national and international bodies. There were also shortcomings in areas including legislation, control, sampling and analysis, management, alternatives, personal protective equipment and waste disposal;

(f) No proper disposal options were available.

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<sup>1</sup> Workshop report available at: [http://www.searo.who.int/en/section23/section1001/section1110\\_12840.htm](http://www.searo.who.int/en/section23/section1001/section1110_12840.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.searo.who.int/en/section23/section1108/section1835/section1864\\_8700.htm](http://www.searo.who.int/en/section23/section1108/section1835/section1864_8700.htm)

## B. Proposed workplan for asbestos waste

8. Based on the present workload and resources available, the Secretariat is proposing that activities on asbestos should commence in 2008. Possible activities to be implemented under the Basel Convention, subject to the availability additional resources, could be as follows:

- (a) The development of technical guidelines on asbestos waste and training materials for the sound management of asbestos wastes with emphasis on measures to be taken in disaster-prone areas which would include:
    - (i) The promotion of safer alternatives and substitutes to asbestos (e.g., for cement sheets that could include polyvinyl alcohol and cellulose fibre-cement, polypropylene and cellulose fibre-cement, bamboo fibre-cement, and other cellulose fibres such as eucalyptus, bagasse, sisal; for roofing tiles it could include “micro-concrete tiles”, which are easily used in rural areas, vegetable fibres and asphalt, clay roofing tiles, galvanized iron roofing (zinc-coated steel), cement reinforced with recycled toothpaste tubes, high-density polyethylene pipe or polyvinyl chloride pipes;
    - (ii) Environmentally sound waste disposal practices;
  - (b) Pilot projects to assist member countries to develop national action programmes for the management, control and elimination of asbestos in the environment in cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations such as WHO and ILO;
  - (c) Promotion of harmonization of national policy and regulations on asbestos use;
  - (d) Awareness-raising activities to be undertaken together with the Basel Convention regional and coordinating centres and other stakeholders;
  - (e) Developing a partnership on asbestos waste.
9. The proposed workplan and budget is contained in the annex to the present document.

## III. Proposed action

10. The Open-ended Working Group may wish to adopt the following decision:

*The Open-ended Working Group,*

1. *Endorses* the proposed workplan and budget for the sound management of asbestos waste;<sup>3</sup>
2. *Invites* countries in a position to do so to contribute financially or in kind towards the implementation of the proposed workplan;
3. *Requests* the Secretariat to report to the Conference of the Parties at its ninth meeting on progress in implementing the proposed workplan;

11. The Open-ended Working Group may also wish to submit the following draft decision to the Conference of the Parties at its ninth meeting:

*The Conference of the Parties*

1. *Adopts* the workplan and budget for the sound management of asbestos waste;<sup>4</sup>
2. *Invites* countries in a position to do so to contribute financially or in kind towards the implementation of the workplan;
3. *Requests* the Secretariat to report to the Conference of the Parties at its tenth meeting on progress in implementing the workplan.

<sup>3</sup> UNEP/CHW/OEWG/6/23, annex

<sup>4</sup> UNEP/CHW.9/[...]

**Annex****Proposed workplan and budget for the sound management of asbestos wastes**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Budget (United States dollars)</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>Time frame</b>
Development of technical guidelines on asbestos waste with emphasis on disaster prone areas	100,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat</li> <li>• UNEP</li> <li>• Rotterdam Convention Secretariat</li> </ul>	2008
Development of training materials for the sound management of asbestos wastes	70,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basel Convention regional centres</li> </ul>	2008/2009
Pilot projects to assist three countries to develop national action programmes for asbestos waste management	150,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat</li> <li>• Basel Convention regional centres</li> <li>• National Governments</li> <li>• Intergovernmental organizations</li> </ul>	2009
National awareness-raising workshops in three countries	150,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basel Convention regional centres</li> <li>• National Governments</li> <li>• Intergovernmental organizations</li> </ul>	2008/2009
Develop a partnership on asbestos waste	To be determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat</li> <li>• Other stakeholders</li> </ul>	2008/2009