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Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee

Second meeting

Geneva, 6–10 November 2006

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Operational issues: treatment of isomers or groups of isomers of
chemicals proposed for listing in Annexes A, B or C of the Convention**

**Approach to considering isomers or groups of isomers of chemicals
proposed for listing in Annexes A, B and/or C of the Convention**

Note by the Secretariat

Background

1. At its first meeting, the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee considered a proposal by Mexico to list lindane in Annexes A, B or C of the Convention (UNEP/POPS/POPRC.1/8 and UNEP/POPS/POPRC.1/INF/8). Lindane is the trade name for 99% pure gamma-hexachlorocyclohexane, one of three major isomers of hexachlorocyclohexane ("HCH").
2. In its proposal, Mexico presented data on the gamma isomer but mentioned as well that other isomers of HCH should also be considered for listing in the annexes. In the proposal's summary statement of the reasons for concern, Mexico stated:

"[I]n the production and purification process to obtain 99% pure gamma-HCH, for every ton of lindane produced, there are 6-10 metric tonnes of the other isomers that must be disposed of or otherwise managed. Lindane being the only isomer in the mixture that has insecticidal properties, there is very limited to no commercial value for the other isomers obtained. Because of this waste isomer problem, the production of hexachlorocyclohexane [including] lindane has been a worldwide problem for years....

Other HCH isomers can be as toxic, persistent and contaminant as lindane, or even more so. The continued use of lindane in the world is causing this important polluting source. Global action is therefore needed to halt the pollution caused worldwide by lindane and its production."

* UNEP/POPS/POPRC.2/1.

3. In its discussion of the lindane proposal at its first meeting, the Committee noted that while the proposal by Mexico mentioned all HCH isomers, the data contained therein mainly related to the gamma isomer, as it is used as a pesticide and is of most commercial interest. It was clear to the Committee, however, that the alpha and beta isomers were produced in large quantities during the production of the gamma isomer. The Committee agreed that while its discussions could include the alpha and beta isomers, any decision to propose inclusion of the chemical in the Convention would apply only to the gamma isomer and that it would request clarification and guidance from the Conference of the Parties on the issue of how to deal with the isomers (see UNEP/POPS/POPRC.1/10, para. 65).

4. At its second meeting, the Conference of the Parties discussed briefly the issue of isomers. In decision SC-2/8, the Committee:

“...takes note of the technical nature of how to consider isomers or groups of isomers of chemicals proposed by Parties for inclusion in Annexes A, B and/or C of the Convention pursuant to Article 8 and requests the [Persistent Organic Pollutants Review] Committee to provide its recommendations for an approach for addressing this issue for consideration by the Conference at its third meeting.”

5. Although Mexico subsequently submitted proposals to the Committee for listing alpha and beta HCH in Annexes A, B or C of the Convention, the general issue of how to consider isomers or groups of isomers of chemicals proposed by Parties may be relevant to future proposals for the listing of other chemicals.

Possible approaches to addressing isomers

6. One possible approach to the issue would be for the Committee to consider only proposed chemicals and not related isomers. As indicated in paragraph 1 of Article 8 of the Convention, a “Party may submit a proposal to the Secretariat for listing a chemical in Annexes A, B and/or C.” Article 8, however, does not provide that the Committee itself may nominate a chemical. It might be considered appropriate for the Committee to identify the importance of other isomers in its evaluation of a proposed chemical, and such information might prompt a Party to propose the isomer(s) for listing in accordance with paragraph 1 of Article 8 at a later date. Under this approach only a chemical or chemicals named in the title of the nomination and described in the introductory text would be evaluated by the Committee, using the procedures and criteria provided in Article 8 and Annex D. Providing occasional references to other isomers in the proposal would not be sufficient for their full consideration under Article 8.

7. A second possible approach to the issue would be for the Committee to provide its expert judgment to the Conference of the Parties on those isomers of proposed chemicals that the Committee believes should be considered at the same time as the proposed chemical. As above, it might be considered appropriate for the Committee to identify the importance of other isomers in its evaluation of a proposed chemical. If, in the view of the Committee, global action to address the proposed chemicals sufficient to manage its adverse health and/or environmental impacts resulting from long-range environmental transport could not be fully effective without also managing some or all of the isomeric forms of the proposed chemical, then the Committee might recommend that the chemical and its critical isomers be added to the Convention. A decision to include such isomers would need to be based on a full evaluation of their properties, fate, long-range movement and toxicity according to Annex D and the information listed in Annex E and Annex F. Under this approach, the inclusion of other isomers could be considered by the Committee, but the isomers would nevertheless have to undergo the same evaluation process as the proposed chemical under Article 8.

Possible action by the Committee

8. The Committee may wish:

(a) To consider possible approaches on how to address isomers of chemicals proposed by Parties for inclusion in Annexes A, B and/or C of the Convention, including the approaches described in paragraphs 6 and 7 above;

(b) To provide recommendations for an approach to addressing the issue to the Conference of the Parties for consideration at its third meeting.