

## APPENDIX

### INTERNATIONAL REGISTER OF POTENTIALLY TOXIC CHEMICALS (IRPTC)

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The International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) was officially set up in 1976 following up a recommendation of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm and a decision of the UNEP Governing Council in 1974. The central unit of the register, known as the Programme Activity Centre (PAC), was set up in Geneva in 1976.

One of the initial objectives of the IRPTC was to facilitate access to scientific and legal data on hazardous chemical substances considered environmentally significant. By providing access to such data on a global scale it was hoped to encourage international cooperation in determining the impact of chemicals on man and the environment. Its aims were officially revised by UNEP's Governing Council in 1989 with five main goals.

1. To make it easier to obtain the existing information on production, distribution, release, disposal and adverse effects of chemicals.
2. To identify the important gaps in our knowledge of the effects of chemicals and call attention to the need for research to fill those gaps.
3. To help identify potential hazards from chemicals and wastes and to improve awareness of the dangers.
4. To provide information about national, regional and global policies, controls and recommendations on potentially toxic chemicals.
5. To help implement policies for the exchange of information on chemicals in international trade.

IRPTC is considered an essential tool in optimizing the use of chemicals for human well-being and at the same time providing a global early warning system of undesirable environmental side effects. Its global network has had considerable impact on the flow of scientific and technical data, and regulatory information on chemicals. Central data files have been developed on many chemicals of international significance and these are in constant use for hazard assessment and risk evaluation at both national and international levels.

In order to help Governments improve chemical safety at a national level, IRPTC has a close working relationship with the International Programme on Chemical Safety and other

international organizations and is involved in chemical safety related programmes run by bodies such as the EC, OECD and former CMEA. It also has contacts with national and international scientific institutions, NGOs and Industry.

IRPTC maintains a databank of centralized computer files linking a formal network of government-nominated institutions. These are called National Correspondents. One of the important functions of the IRPTC is to train National Correspondents and other personnel in the use of the register. There are currently 121 Correspondents in 112 countries and they play a pivotal role in all IRPTC activities. Correspondents are usually specialists in one or more fields such as toxicology, public and occupational health, agriculture, industrial and environmental sciences.

However, it is their close links with authoritative bodies that provide environmental protection services in their country that is of special significance to the IRPTC. These links enable them to obtain information on relevant national legislation and regulations on control of chemical hazards and reports and reviews on chemicals and on accidents and incidents resulting from the loss of chemicals into the environment. Correspondents are also well placed to access data banks and information systems in their home country relevant to the IRPTC's activities. Furthermore, they are responsible for the promotion and distribution of IRPTC publications to individuals, institutions and industries. Readers interested in contacting the National Correspondent in their country should contact the IRPTC at the address given below.

Another important activity of the IRPTC is its Query Response Service. This service has been in operation almost since the IRPTC's inception in 1976. Table 1 shows how the number of queries have grown since the 11 enquiries in the first year. It should be noted however that the number of enquiries does not reflect the number of chemicals to which the IRPTC responds to, since one query may request information on numerous chemicals.

**Table 1** Queries received by IRPTC (1976-1991)

Year	Yearly total	Cumulative total
1976	11	11
1977	11	22
1978	19	41
1979	34	75
1980	46	121
1981	69	190
1982	105	295
1983	197	492
1984	201	693
1985	335	1028
1986	292	1320
1987	312	1632
1988	350	1982
1989	450	2432
1990	423	2855
1991	601	3456

Source: IRPTC

The Query-Response Service is operated free of charge as there is a concern that fees would deter queries. Furthermore, the service is of great benefit to IRPTC staff as well, as it identifies areas that are either not covered or covered poorly.

The IRPTC database is run on a mainframe computer at the International Computing Centre in Geneva. A version of the entire database is available on-line in Canada through Health and Welfare Canada in Ottawa. The Legal File and the Waste Management File may be accessed on-line through ECDIN, the Environmental Chemicals Data and Information Network of the EEC at the host DIMDI in Cologne, Germany.

Even with its own computerized database on chemicals, other sources are also often consulted, when necessary, to answer questions. Once again its links with organizations help in the speedy procurement of information.

IRPTC is currently in the process of converting its database to operate on a personal computer such that the data are even more readily available. At the outset a limited number of network and contributing partners, restricted to national authorities and associated institutes, will receive the data and the software during the first phase of the release in 1992. A wider scale distribution is envisaged at a later date.

IRPTC publishes the Legal File (covering over 8,000 chemicals) and the Waste File of the Register as independent documents. Both are currently being updated with an aim to produce them early in 1993.

The IRPTC Bulletin is the official journal of the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals and is devoted to information on hazardous chemicals. It is published twice a year and although the subscription price is US\$25 per annum, preferential rates are available particularly to interested parties in developing countries.

In 1983 a project was begun to help developing countries establish national registers of potentially toxic chemicals (NRPTCs). IRPTC worked with five countries in 1984 and a further five in 1986. The countries are Brazil, China, Colombia, Gambia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand and Zambia.

In addition to setting five main goals in 1989, UNEP's Governing Council also provided special provisions known as the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure as part of the London Guidelines for the Exchange of Information on Chemicals in International Trade. PIC is the principle that a chemical banned or severely restricted for health or environmental reasons should not be shipped in international trade without the agreement of the importing country. A procedure was provided for countries to record their decisions on such chemicals in a formal way.

Under the procedure countries are provided with Decision Guidance Documents, designed to help them to assess the PIC chemical's health and environmental risks, in order that an

informed decision (on whether they wish to ban or allow future import of the chemicals concerned) can be made. It is then up to participating countries to enforce these decisions. Details of these exchanges are entered into a joint PIC FAO/UNEP database. The procedure was initiated in the autumn of 1991, with the distribution of Decision Guidance Documents for the first six pesticides.

Initially, the procedure will be applied to chemicals banned or severely restricted in ten or more countries. Furthermore, some acutely hazardous pesticides found to be causing problems under conditions of use in developing countries will be included, even though they have not been banned or severely restricted in any country. Eventually the procedure will be applied to all chemicals banned or severely restricted in any country.

IRPTC was established primarily to aid national authorities responsible for the protection of human health and the environment, but its services are available to everyone. Readers interested in obtaining a more thorough understanding of the works of the IRPTC should direct their enquiries to the following:

The Director,  
IRPTC/UNEP,  
Palais des Nations,  
CH - 1211 Geneva 10,  
Switzerland.

Tel: 41-22-798-8400  
41-22-798-5850  
Fax: 41-22-733-2673  
Telex: 415 465 UNE CH  
Cables: UNITERRA, GENEVA

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