

Chemicals Risks - WG Recommendations

Tuesday 17th January

The rapporteur for this group, Diane Heminway, of the United Steelworkers of America (USW) said the group recommended the following actions:

RECOMMENDATIONS AT VARIOUS LEVELS:

To Trade Unions at the Local Level:

- Promote education and training on chemical hazards – both workplace and environmental.
- Promote Right to Know and Right to Participate in workplace decisions (i. e. which chemicals are used).
- Develop collective bargaining language that includes health, safety, and environmental concerns – i. e. call for a joint labour-management committee to evaluate and address areas of concern such as chemical use, chemical monitoring, and disposal practices.
- Develop strategies to protect workers and the environment, aimed at exposure reduction and accident prevention.
- Involve workers at the enterprise level, using a systems approach that is continually reviewed and improved.

To Trade Unions at the District/National Level:

- Provide information, training and support to workers at every level.
- Focus on capacity building, including where appropriate, a tripartite approach with workers, industry and government to engage in discussions on health and safety codes of practice, inspections, legislation, etc.
- Build alliances with other unions, NGO's and other organisations with common goals.
- Maintain registries of chemical accidents, poisonings and workplace illnesses.
- Lobby governments to ratify ILO conventions related to chemical use.
- Ensure that voluntary agreements are not used as substitutes to legally binding agreements, legislations and enforcements.
- Promote Green Chemistry.

To Trade Unions at the Regional and International Levels:

- Exchange and disseminate information on safe chemicals management, including assessing alternatives, products, and processes.
- Participate in SAICM, POPs, GHS (Globally Harmonized System) and other international instruments.
- Participate in international campaigns to ban chemicals of high concern (e.g. asbestos, pesticides, etc.)

To Governments:

- Enforce existing laws and agreements.
- Phase out or ban chemicals of high concern (not to be exported).
- Ratify ILO conventions and other relevant international instruments (SAICAM, POPs).
- Ensure there are adequate resources to develop a strong programme for training, control, inspection, and enforcement.
- Adopt chemicals legislation based on principles such as "no data-no market," "burden of proof on the producer".
- Establish a system that tracks the origin, release, and disposal of hazardous chemicals.
- Ensure workers have a legal right to participate in environmental issues to provide the legal tool needed to carry out their roles as involved "stakeholders."
- Use public money to create a Clean Production Centre.

To UNEP:

- Improve mechanisms to involve Trade Unions in existing and future initiatives.

To other Major Groups:

NGOs (environment, consumer, women, public health, etc.):

- Develop synergies with Trade Unions to work toward common goals.
- Develop or reinforce close collaboration with Trade Unions by providing them with relevant studies, reports and actions on public health and the environment – jointly releasing such items when appropriate.
- Improve channels of communication with Trade Unions to ensure that mutual concerns are understood and addressed.
- Find solutions together.

Implementation:

- At every level (local to international), explore and expand our allies: physicians, women's groups, indigenous peoples, others.
- Establish a mechanism, such as a list serve, where information and strategies can be shared internationally.
- Develop an Implementation Committee with contact information for follow-up. Set goals, establish time lines, and mark progress.
- As a follow-up to this Assembly, co-sponsors should draft letters on behalf of participants for their use at appropriate events, particularly international events.