

## **Intervention / contribution of Switzerland on the agenda item: Thematic discussions on Chemicals**

May 4, 2010

### **Importance of chemicals for Switzerland in general**

- As mentioned in the majority of statements given yesterday morning, Chemicals offer tremendous opportunities and benefits. Today's well-being would not be possible without chemicals. At the same time, chemicals can also pose a challenge and risk to the environment and the human health.
- As host of many important international institutions in the area of chemicals and wastes and also as host to an important industrial sector in this area, Switzerland considers having a specific responsibility.
- Thus for Switzerland the sustainable management of chemicals is an important priority, not only at the national level, but also internationally.

### **Answers to the 5 questions**

#### **1) Prioritisation of chemicals and waste in national policy**

- In the light of the global interdependencies, the opportunities and benefits of chemicals do not remain limited to one place, nor can the challenges be addressed locally in an effective manner. Therefore, international cooperation to promote sustainable development is especially necessary in the field of chemicals.
- Switzerland has strongly promoted the strengthening of synergies, cooperation and coordination within the international chemicals and waste cluster. For example Switzerland has taken a leading role in the development of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).
- As such, the implementation of an effective and efficient chemicals and waste policy has to occur in an integrated and coordinated manner. Such an approach facilitates and even requires for the prioritisation of sound management of chemicals at international, regional and as well at national level.
- The CSD could, through a clear support for the implementation and further development of the synergy process within the chemicals and waste cluster, provide a valuable contribution for the prioritisation of chemicals in national development plans but as well on the international agenda of sustainable development.

#### **2) Compliance with the Chemicals and Waste MEA**

- Chemicals and waste have been one of the success stories since the Rio conference. Important international legal instruments and frameworks have been adopted with regard to the sound management of hazardous chemicals and wastes, namely the Basel Convention, the Rotterdam Convention (PIC), the Stockholm Convention (POPs), the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). We should make use of the capacity building opportunities

these instruments provide and we should also make use of the specific know how and assistance that can be provided by organizations such as UNEP through its Chemicals Branch, UNITAR, the WHO and the ILO.

- And here as well the Synergy process can play an important role to facilitate and enhance in the long term the implementation of MEA at national level. For example through common reporting on all three convention *or through increased resource mobilisation* or even through enhancing cooperation and coordination among agencies and offices at national level.
- Rules and regulations are only as effective as their implementation. Cleaner Production Centers are tools that can play a very important role in supporting the implementation of chemicals and wastes policies in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, where demand for chemicals continues to increase.
- The worldwide introduction and implementation of the Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals GHS is also an important contribution to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition to implement and comply with the MEAS and will facilitate world trade in chemical products and improve international communication about risk management and the hazard properties of chemicals.
- Switzerland is supporting and implementing for a long time instruments such as the Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals GHS and is also one of the main donors to the SAICM Quick Start Programme.

#### **4) Promotion of effective public-private partnership**

- Switzerland would like to share its experience regarding the cooperation and coordination with the business and in particular the industry in sound management of chemicals and wastes.
- At the national level, Switzerland is pursuing the goal of a sound management of chemicals with a mix of different instruments. It has developed a comprehensive system of national regulations that is complemented with economic instruments and also with voluntary measures undertaken by the chemical industry.
- An example of effective partnership approach with the industry/business sector is the incentive tax on volatile organic compounds (VOC) which was introduced in the year 2000. The tax on VOCs is a financial incentive to encourage firms to reduce emissions and to adopt processes, substances and products that respect the environment. The incentive tax is a flexible instrument: Each company is obliged to decide to what extent it wants to reduce the use of VOCs and accordingly to the level of reduction the obligation for paying the tax decreases. The proceeds from the tax are then distributed evenly across the population to co-finance the compulsory health insurance. Emissions of VOCs targeted by the incentive tax have resulted in a relevant decrease since the introduction of the tax.
- Another important factor for an effective partnership with industry and business is an active national policy to promote Switzerland as an attractive environment for investments in innovation and the further development of sustainable industries.

### **5) An important new area of potentials and risks: nanotechnologies**

- Environmental effects and fate of many chemicals has been evaluated and addressed however there remain still challenges in the sound management of chemical, in particular for new and emerging technologies.
- One example where this needs to happen is nanotechnology and manufactured nanomaterials. This new emerging issue offers a wide range of applications in medicine, energy technology, water purification, the storage of data, the manufacture of new materials, etc. However, the potential and also the risks of this new technology still remain difficult to assess.

- At the national level, Switzerland has therefore developed an action plan for the assessment and management of risks associated with nanotechnology and manufactured nanomaterials.
- At the international level, Switzerland supports the active implementation and the further development of the SAICM in particular with regard to the new and emerging issue nanotechnology and nanomaterials. For example: Switzerland supports the awareness workshops on nanotechnology and manufactured nanomaterials implemented by UNITAR in cooperation with OECD which have been held in all UN regions in 2009/10.

### **3) Life cycle approach -**

- The life cycle approach is a basic principle embraced by Switzerland for the development of all regulations and measures on sound chemicals management.
- Originally introduced as a cradle to grave concept it has now transformed into a cradle to cradle approach with reduce, reuse or recycle of materials where possible or alternatively the recovery of energy as a final option.
- In order to implement and achieve this life cycle approach it is necessary to invest in a suitable infrastructure to which Switzerland has been committed for many years and which it continues to expand. In short cradle to cradle makes sound environmental, social and economical sense.