



Factsheet

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Environmental regulation of chemicals and hazardous waste

Three conventions regulate chemicals and hazardous waste at environmental level: the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (PIC Convention), the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP Convention) and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.

The PIC Convention

Together with around 60 states and the EU, Switzerland signed the PIC Convention in Rotterdam on 11 September 1998. This convention obliges the participating states to inform other contracting parties about the enactment of bans and stringent restrictions on the use of chemicals, and to report exports of such regulated substances to importing countries. In addition, the contracting parties are obliged to decide whether the importation of the chemicals named in the convention is allowed or not, and if it is, the conditions under which it is authorised (import decisions). This approach is known as “prior informed consent” (PIC). Deliveries against the volition of the importing country are not allowed. The convention, which is binding under international law, helps to reduce the potential environmental and health risks posed by certain hazardous chemicals. In particular, it protects the users of chemicals in agriculture and industry and in developing and newly industrialised countries, and also limits the risks to the environment. The convention came into force on 24 February 2004 and now has 152 contracting parties.

Switzerland ratified the PIC Convention on 10 January 2002, thereby expressing its international commitment and – as an important producer of chemicals – its solidarity with developing countries, for which the cooperation required by the convention is of great importance.

The POP Convention

Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are highly toxic chemical substances that are not readily degradable. Once released, they spread around the globe via air and water and through the

food chain and can, therefore, affect people and the environment in locations at a huge distance from the place in which they were released. They can cause cancer, endocrine disorders and reproductive disorders.

Together with 91 other states, Switzerland signed the Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP Convention) in Stockholm on 22 May 2001, and ratified it on 30 July 2003. The POP Convention now has 179 contracting parties and aims to introduce measures at global level for the prevention and reduction of the environmental inputs of persistent organic pollutants. It contains, inter alia, bans and restrictions on the manufacture, use, import and export of 21 substances.

The Stockholm Convention contains a ban on the production and use of substances are listed in its Annexes A ("Elimination") and B ("Restriction"). Specific exceptional regulations may be negotiated for each substance on a case-by-case basis. Imports and exports are then only allowed for purposes specifically excluded from the ban or for environmentally-friendly disposal.

The Basel Convention

The Basel Convention, which was concluded in 1989 and came into force on 5 May 1992, aims to control transboundary movements of hazardous waste and ensure that such waste is disposed of in a way that does not cause harm to the environment. This process includes, in particular, the prior registration of planned exports and the agreement of all affected states. The illegal disposal of huge volumes of, for the most part, controlled electronic waste from industrialised states in Asia (i.e. China and India) and Africa (e.g. Nigeria), which can cause significant damage to health and the environment, demonstrate the continuing relevance of the convention. The Basel Convention is increasingly developing into a comprehensive international convention on the environmentally sound disposal and recycling of waste.

The Basel Convention was ratified by 180 states including the EU and all OECD states except the USA. Switzerland holds the Presidency of the Basel Convention in the person of Franz Perrez (Head of the International Affairs Division of the FOEN).

The so-called Ban Amendment (ban on the export of hazardous waste from OECD countries into other states) was ratified by 74 contracting parties. For this ban to come into force, 15 other states must ratify it.

Switzerland supports better cooperation with the private sector. The "Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative", which was instigated by Switzerland in the context of the Basel Convention, aims to limit the transboundary export of end-of-life mobile telephones from Europe and North America and their further processing in Asian and African states in an environmentally-unsound manner. Voluntary guidelines for the sustainable management of mobile-telephone electronic waste were developed in close cooperation with the relevant states and the mobile telephone manufacturers. Based on this experience, Switzerland launched a further partnership for the sustainable management of disused computers and computer equipment. It is also planned to develop specific guidelines in this area.

Internet

- Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative (MPPI) <http://archive.basel.int/industry/mppi.html>

- Partnership for Action on Computing Equipment (PACE)
<http://archive.basel.int/industry/compartnership/index.html>
- Common homepage of the three conventions <http://synergies.pops.int>