

## UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was established in 1972 to coordinate and stimulate environmental action within the UN system and to provide technical and managerial assistance to countries requiring it. UNEP headquarters are in Nairobi, Kenya, but the agency has its European regional office as well as various program or convention offices in Geneva. The Executive Director of UNEP is Klaus Töpfer, former Environment Minister of Germany.

### UNEP REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

UNEP has six regional offices, of which the European Office covers Western, Central and Eastern Europe including the Newly Independent States (NIS) as successor states of the former Soviet Union. Based in Geneva, the regional office liaises with other UN-agencies in Europe, with European governments, and with non-governmental organizations in the region.

### ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Environmental Management Group (EMG) was approved by the UN General Assembly in 1999. The EMG is chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP, who reports directly to the UN Secretary-General. Its Secretariat is based in Geneva. The EMG promotes coordination and joint action in key areas of environmental and human settlements concern within and beyond the UN system, including the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO. Issues selected by EMG since its first meeting in January 2001, have included the harmonization of biodiversity-related reporting (with UNEP as the lead agency), the development of a system-wide approach to environmental education and training (with UNESCO as the lead agency), waste management (with UNEP and UNIDO as lead agencies) and chemicals (with UNEP as the lead agency).

### EARTHWATCH

The United Nations system-wide Earthwatch network has a secretariat in Geneva. The Earthwatch mechanism is an initiative to coordinate and catalyze environmental observation activities among all UN agencies for integrated assessment purposes.

### GRID

The Global Resource Information Data Base (GRID), is responsible for the collection and distribution of global environmental data, with an emphasis on satellite imagery and geographic information systems (GIS) technology. Established in 1985, GRID-Geneva was a pioneering center in the system. There are currently 15 GRID centers operating in all regions of the world and administered by UNEP's Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) based at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.

### POST-CONFLICT ASSESSMENT UNIT

In 1999, UNEP began working in the Balkans region to determine the environmental risks following the Kosovo conflict and prioritize needs for clean-up. Building on the experience in the Balkans, UNEP established a Post-Conflict Assessment Unit in

2001 to undertake similar work in other post-conflict areas. PCAU investigates environmental impacts following conflicts, identifies risks to human and environmental health; recommends strategic priorities for clean-up; and integrates environmental considerations into the post-conflict reconstruction process. The post-conflict assessments include working with donors to secure funds for clean-up activities. The PCAU has undertaken work in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and the Middle East.

## UNEP CHEMICALS

UNEP Chemicals aims to ensure the sound management of hazardous chemicals. This Geneva-based UNEP program seeks to improve chemical safety by providing information about toxic chemicals and supporting actions to reduce or eliminate chemical risks. UNEP Chemicals also provides support for the secretariats of two international treaties governing hazardous chemical substances, the Stockholm Convention and the Rotterdam Convention.

## THE STOCKHOLM CONVENTION

The Stockholm Convention is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants (POPs). POPs are chemicals that remain intact in the environment for long periods, become widely distributed geographically, accumulate in the fatty tissue of living organisms and are toxic to humans and wildlife. Their effects on humans and wildlife include birth defects, cancer, and disfunctioning immune, development and reproductive systems. The convention calls for action on 12 initial POPs, nine of which are pesticides (aldrin, chlordane, DDT, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlor, hexachlorobenzene, mirex and toxaphene), two industrial chemicals (hexachlorobenzene and PCBs), dioxins and furans. The Stockholm Convention will enter force on the ninetieth day after the date of deposit of the 50<sup>th</sup> instrument of ratification. As of October 2003, 30 nations had ratified the treaty. The United States signed the convention in May 2001, but had not yet ratified it.

## THE ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

The Rotterdam Convention aims to “promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment from potential harm and to contribute to their environmentally sound use.” Governments began to address the problem of toxic pesticides and other hazardous chemicals in the 1980s by establishing a voluntary Prior Informed Consent procedure. PIC required exporters trading in a list of hazardous substances to obtain the prior informed consent of importers before proceeding with the trade. In 1998, governments decided to strengthen the procedure by adopting the Rotterdam Convention, which makes PIC legally binding. The convention establishes a first line of defense by giving importing countries the tools and information they need to identify potential hazards and exclude chemicals they cannot manage safely. When a country agrees to import chemicals, the convention promotes their safe use through labeling standards, technical assistance, and other forms of support. It also ensures that exporters comply with the requirements. The convention will enter into force after the 50<sup>th</sup> state becomes party to it. As of mid-October 2003, the United States had signed but not ratified the convention.

## MERCURY PROGRAM

Following the publication of the “Global Mercury Assessment” report in early 2003, UNEP’s Governing Council found that there was evidence of “significant global adverse impacts from mercury” and called for further international action to reduce to the risks to humans and wildlife. In response, a Mercury Program was established within UNEP Chemicals which aims to eliminate as far as possible the release of mercury into the environment. As a first step during 2004, UNEP Chemicals plans to organize a series of workshops for developing countries to help them to identify and understand any mercury problems in their country and develop tools to mitigate the problem.

## ENVIRONMENT AND TRADE

The need for integration of environment and trade policies was identified at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development Conference (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro as a key challenge for the future. As part of its UNCED follow-up, UNEP established an Environment and Trade unit in 1993 to work in this area. The unit is based in Geneva and charged with coordinating UNEP’s work with that of other international organizations, notably WTO and UNCTAD. UNEP’s workplan on trade and environment focuses on three areas:

- 1) Legal compatibility between WTO rules and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) which use trade measures to achieve environmental goals;
- 2) Clarification of scientific and environmental data to help frame or resolve trade-environment issues, and;
- 3) Analysis of the trade effects of economic policy instruments and impact on trade of pricing which incorporates environmental costs and benefits.

## INTERNET

*www.unep.ch*

Information about UNEP and its programs, information on convention secretariats, texts of treaties, links to other environmental sites.

## ADDRESS

United Nations Environment Program  
International Environment House  
15, chemin des Anémones  
CH-1219 Châtelaine, Geneva  
Tel: 022.917.8279  
Fax: 022.917.8024