

CSD 18 – NORWAY: Chemicals

Norway has over the last few decades established a comprehensive framework of sound chemicals management. Our chemicals policy and the actions taken are intended to ensure a high level of protection for consumers and employees against exposure for the environment.

Although much has been done to reduce the health and environmental risks associated with hazardous substances, our efforts are not sufficient to deal with the long term problems.

As such, Norway is a strong advocate of a high level of protection for health and the environment through the EU chemicals system, REACH, which we are a part of.

Under this system responsibility has been moved from governments, having to prove the risks, to requiring manufacturers and importers to make sure that substances do not harm human health or the environment.

Mercury is one of the most dangerous heavy metals, together with Persistent Organic Pollutant such as PCBs, dioxins and brominated flame retardants. We are currently witnessing an increase in mercury pollution in the Arctic region as a result of long-range transport. This poses a serious health threat to population groups whose diet includes a substantial proportion of marine mammals. Seabirds are also vulnerable.

Nationally Norway has taken this pollution problem seriously and has introduced strict legislation regarding mercury that prohibits manufacturing, imports, exports, sales and the use of substances or mixtures that contain mercury or mercury compounds. In this regard, we will also work actively towards a new global instrument to eliminate releases of mercury.

Norway is working continuously towards an expansion of the scope of the Stockholm Convention, so that more substances are covered by a global prohibition.

Mr. Chairman we also believe that the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management constitutes an important policy framework to promote chemicals safety, capacity building and as a tool to achieve the 2020 goal of “using and producing chemicals in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment”.

Use, dissemination and destruction of chemicals will most probably be affected by climate change. First, water shortages, flooding, changes in growth zones, the spread of pests and plant diseases and reduced harvests may lead farmers to switch to other crops and thus other chemicals to combat plant diseases. Second, pesticides may be less effective and broken down faster in warmer temperatures, which can lead to more frequent use and thus increase the exposure of hazardous chemicals.

To meet these new challenges coordination between sectoral authorities, such as health, agriculture and environment will be crucial.