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AD HOC GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY

Seventh ad hoc Meeting for the Comparative Data Bank
on Chemical Legislation in ECE Member Countries

8 October 1998

REPORT ON THE SEVENTH AD HOC MEETING

Prepared by the secretariat

Introductory Remarks

At its second session held in October 1992, the former Working Party on the Chemical Industry decided to include in its programme of work a comparative study on chemical legislation in the member States of UN/ECE. During the subsequent Meetings of Experts on Chemical Legislation it was decided to convert the study to a data bank and to publish it in electronic format. An initial version was distributed to delegations on diskettes, with comments solicited. It was later decided that the European Commission would be entrusted with the final publication of the data bank on CD-ROM, together with four other databases of the European Union. However, for administrative, legal and technical reasons this was not possible within a reasonable time limit, and UN/ECE produced the CHEMLEX CD-ROM independently.

The CHEMLEX CD-ROM had been distributed to all delegations in advance of the present Meeting, so that national experts would have an opportunity to test it and report their findings.

1. The seventh ad hoc Meeting for the Comparative Data Bank on Chemical Legislation in ECE Member Countries was held on 8 October 1998.

2. Delegations from the following countries participated in the Meeting: Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine. A representative of the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC) was also present.

Adoption of the agenda

3. The participants adopted the provisional agenda for the meeting (TRADE/CHEM/AC.4/2).

Election of the Chairman

4. Mr. J. Coupek (Czech Republic) was elected Chairman.

Progress report

(a) CHEMLEX CD-ROM production and distribution

5. A member of the secretariat reported that the CD-ROM of CHEMLEX had been issued as a sales item of the United Nations. A press release describing the publication had been sent to all major news journals and to the worldwide chemical press. This first edition of CHEMLEX contains data from 25 countries plus directives from the European Union. It is searchable in English and in French, but the results are only available in English.

6. A demonstration of the use of the CD-ROM was provided to the Meeting, illustrating both simple and complex queries that could be posed to the database. The demonstration included the use of the comparative analysis as well as standard search methods. It was shown that the database would be useful to countries whose legislation was still rather sparse or not in harmony with that of other countries of the ECE region. Users of the database would therefore be Ministries of Industry and legislators in such countries, as well as lawyers and NGOs concerned with chemical activities. Furthermore, manufacturing and trading enterprises dealing with international shipping of chemicals needed to know about the legislation of destination markets as well as that of countries in which their products might transit.

(b) Production of a CD-ROM in conjunction with other databases of the European Commission

7. As noted above, the databases of the European Union were not incorporated; the European Commission has published its own database collection as part of its RISC (Réseau d'Information Secteur Chimique) Chemical Sector Information Network.

(c) Resource support

8. The CHEMLEX project was initially launched and financed by DG III of the European Commission. Subsequently the Commission reported that it was no longer able to finance further stages of the project. Thus, the UNOG Sales and Marketing Service covered most of the CD-ROM development costs and publication of the CD-ROM. Future work on the project would depend on supporting the costs of a consultant to carry out the work desired by delegations, who were requested to assist the secretariat seriously in providing such funding.

(d) Translation into Russian

9. The delegation of Ukraine stated that it would investigate the possibility of generating a totally Russian version of the database. The secretariat reported that incorporation of Cyrillic information, up to and including a full database, was also being investigated by the developer of the original software.

Future work

(a) Second edition: additional geographic coverage and scope

10. It had been decided earlier that CHEMLEX should be a continuing project, and that the first issue of the CD-ROM should elicit comments and suggestions from all user categories. The Meeting desired that the coverage of the database should be extended to include more of the 55 ECE member States than was currently the case. While it would be useful to include non-ECE countries such as Japan and China it was recognized that resource limitations would prevent that.

11. The coverage should, at present, not be extended to sectors of the chemical industry that were not already included. It should be brought up to date. A new edition should be prepared for the end of 1999.

(b) Extension of comparative analysis

12. The comparative analysis, which at present included only 15 of the 26 countries covered by the CD-ROM (with the European Union directives), should be expanded to cover all entered States.

Results of the meeting

13. The Meeting entrusted the secretariat with the preparation and distribution of the present Report.
