Welcome and Opening Remarks

This 2020 has proven to be like none before. The COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts have been felt across economies all over the world. Travel restrictions, disruptions in supply chains and shifting government and industry priorities have called for all to find new ways to adapt to a changing reality. In response, this year the Helsinki Chemicals Forum (HCF) and REACH24H decided to host a full virtual forum for the first time.

The 2020 Asian HCF was designed as an adapted version of the original HCF Forum which takes place each year in Helsinki, Finland, but with a stronger presence of expert-based opinions from top Asian voices in the field. As this year’s Helsinki HCF conference was postponed due to the covid-19 pandemic, three panel topics were for the first time debated in Asia before they reach Europe in April 2021.

We hope you can enjoy the highlights from the Keynotes delivered by UNEP, OECD and ECHA and from the debates during each of the three day panels these institutions moderated. The moderators were very satisfied with the content of the debate and conclusions they could draw.

A warm thank you to all of you who joined the CRAC-HCF 2020 Virtual Forum. Hope you will find valuable information and professional ideas in the report to help the chemical industry keep advancing towards a more sustainable and safer future.

REACH24H & Asian HCF Coordination Team
Who We Are

About CRAC-HCF 2020 Virtual Forum

The CRAC-HCF 2020 Virtual Forum represents the first-ever joint venture between Helsinki Chemicals Forum (HCF) and REACH24H Chemical Regulatory Annual Conference (CRAC). In a year of truly unexpected challenges for the international community, REACH24H and HCF offered a virtual event free of charge to all professionals in the field, from November 16 to December 10, 2020.

The ambitious four-week agenda began with 2020 Asian HCF running for three days, followed by CRAC Conference breakout sessions touching on chemicals management, environmental safety, pesticides, disinfection products, cosmetics and food contact materials in Asia, EU, U.S and other major trade partners.

The overall Forum was divided into 6 sessions, with 60+ Guest Speakers delivering presentations on over 70 different topics. The CRAC-HCF 2020 Virtual Forum has had, as of the date of this report, over 9000 successfully registered participants from 91 countries.

To learn more, visit the Official Forum Website.

Helsinki Chemicals Forum

The Helsinki Chemicals Forum (HCF) is an independent non-profit forum founded by the Finnish Fair Foundation and the City of Helsinki aimed at promoting chemicals safety and chemicals management globally. HCF has held annual high-level conferences in Helsinki every year since 2009, supported by European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), the European Commission (EC) and the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC) and a number of Finnish Government ministries.

Click here to learn more about HCF.

Geert Dancet
Secretary General

REACH24H Consulting Group

Founded in 2009, REACH24H is a Consulting Company specialized in providing one-stop global market access services to companies in the field of industrial chemicals, agrochemicals, cosmetics, food and food contact materials.

REACH24H operates from its HQ in China, offices in Taiwan region, South Korea, UK and the U.S., and business representatives in Japan, UK, EU and South America.

Click here to learn more about REACH24H.

Kent Li
General Manager
INTRODUCTION

Panel 1 of HCF Asia 2020 focused on the world priorities for chemicals and waste beyond 2020. Ms. MacDevette from UNEP and 4 panel speakers shared their views on how the upcoming fifth International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5) can bridge the divide across countries concerning chemicals and waste management capacities identified in the second Global Chemicals Outlook.

IN A FEW WORDS

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is an international voluntary policy framework originally designed for the 2020 Goal. SAICM was first adopted in February 2006 at the first session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM1) in Dubai. It was later refined at three further ICCM’s (2009, 2012 and 2015).

ICCM5, scheduled for July 2021, aims to finalize a new policy framework to achieve the even more ambitious strategic development goals set for 2030 affecting chemicals and waste management. The GCO-II identified 10 actions which can achieve better results in the future. In the run up to ICCM5, stakeholders have selected five strategic objectives for the future framework but these require further refinement over the coming months.
HIGHLIGHTS FROM KEYNOTE AND PANEL

- There are countries where the Global Harmonized System (GHS) has yet to be implemented. Stronger partnerships can assist them to incorporate this system into the chemicals management planning and capacity building scheme;
- There is a need to maximize the value of existing chemicals’ data and knowledge across regions to avoid duplication of data;
- Databases should be target-oriented and fit for purpose by improving existing data portals, e.g. OECD eChemPortal, to suit the needs of all countries;
- Exchange mechanisms could be set up whereby access to hazard data is granted while maintaining the confidentiality of commercial information;
- A people-centered approach should be the end-goal, one that recognizes all actors along the value chain, including the broad environmental and social clusters;
- Capacity building is a priority to enable more countries to manage chemicals and waste. Clearinghouses can support global efforts by horizontally linking the capacity building needs of countries with those who are able to provide it. Clearinghouses can support global efforts by horizontally linking the needs of countries that need a capacity building with those who are able to provide it. The Special Program on Institutional Strengthening developed by UNEP is one of the many examples providing support to developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- Financial support infrastructure: resources to address sound chemicals management are not sufficient and should not only include government but should include integrated financing schemes that make the industry an active contributor and accountable stakeholder;
- Science must drive effective policy decisions. More ambitious strategies require academia, industry, and NGOs to collaborate, and ensure smart indicators and clear targets drive innovation and ultimately yield more holistic and effective regulations based on past learnings;
- Legally binding and voluntary systems are complimentary. Establishing tangible targets, measurable outcomes and implementation goals are the keys for adoption;
- **China as Key Player:** Given the growth projection in China in both demand and production, China’s involvement is vital to ensure sound global management of chemicals;
- Green finance and development schemes under China’s Belt and Road Initiative are expected to offer full green-certified codes beyond local requirements which illustrate that China is taking positive steps;
- Another example that illustrates China’s efforts to include more stakeholders is the Alliance of Computational Toxicology, an initiative achieved in 2018 through joint efforts of MEE, CPCIF and academia;
- There is still a need in China to keep up with its ability and capacity to manage the circularity of this demand, so coordinated risk management of chemicals of global concern and chemical hazard communication should be set as priorities.
- SAICM offers a good opportunity to reflect on a better post-COVID global response.

COMMON GROUND

- A more ambitious SAICM agenda will require common effort and commitment.
- All stakeholders across the value chain must assume a bigger role, prioritizing smart indicators and targets, knowledge-sharing cooperation schemes that take into account recipient countries and highlight a wider societal inclusion;
- Leading organizations, where UNEP is invited to fulfill the role, must send clearer messages and support coordination.
Panel 2 Safer Substitution

**INTRODUCTION**

With increasing global awareness of the need for safer and sustainable substitution of hazardous chemicals, a panel of representatives from regulators, industry, NGOs and academia, led by Ms. Eeva Leinala from OECD as Moderator shared ideas, discussed challenges and searched for possible ways to increase the pace towards the implementation of safer alternatives.

**IN A FEW WORDS**

*Substitution* refers to the replacement or reduction of hazardous substances in products and processes by less hazardous or nonhazardous substances, or by achieving an equivalent functionality via technological or organisational measures.

**OECD Activities - Supporting Sustainable Substitution**

- Substitution and Alternatives Assessment Toolbox
- Global PFC Group: Shifting towards safer alternatives of PFAS
- Global Portal to information on chemical substances
HIGHLIGHTS FROM KEYNOTE AND PANEL

▶ Historically, substitution has occurred in response to regulatory and market place actions to manage the risks of chemicals of concern;
▶ There is an increased level of awareness as to the impact of hazardous chemicals on health. Consumers are demanding a greener options and shifts in regulations are pushing the industry to be more proactive toward chemical management and sustainable practices;
▶ Regulations vs. innovation: In line with social concerns, regulations have the power to drive companies to shift towards substitution. It can be argued that the anticipation of regulations also encourages companies to search for innovative safer solutions but innovation literature shows that these drivers for substitution have to be supplemented with incentives and support as well;
▶ The rapid advancement of industry shows a push for more sustainably focused R&D and innovation;
▶ A multi-approach strategy could prove more effective at redirecting capacity towards substitution. Such a scheme would provide incentives to bring in investment to chemicals in the path to being regulated, along with policy instruments that make it less attractive to use the most hazardous chemicals;
▶ For chemical companies with global market presence, policy sensitivity and perceived reputational risk are relevant drivers for innovation though the market also has to be willing to share the costs of investments and reformulation;
▶ The chemical industry ranks as one of the most innovative industries but it is unclear as to whether this innovation is towards more sustainable chemicals, and in parallel there are still limitations in R&D support by governments, showing an average of 0.5% GDP;
▶ The shift towards substitution can be resource and information-intensive;
▶ SMEs are limited in their capacity to undertake detailed data searches, evidencing the need for more accessible and actionable information sharing programs, such as the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Institute’s P2OASys hazard assessment tool;
▶ Governments still have a key role in ensuring sufficient and sustained funding and infrastructure are aligned with innovation priorities;
▶ More attention and resources should be placed on advancing clear signals to the marketplace (regulatory or market-based) on the chemical functions and applications of concern;
▶ Due to China’s increasing role in the global chemical industry, any global shift towards greener and more sustainable practices will require China’s commitment and active promotion;
▶ Larger Chinese chemical companies are the ones typically driving substitution, with greater access to resources, high-end technology and capacity-building, which allows them to maintain sensitivity to global-market changes and regulations;
▶ SMEs in China have limited support to pursue greener alternatives. They face barriers in securing funding, green technical training of staff, technology and access to information;
▶ Companies sharing positive examples and green solutions can incentivize the shift. Despite sector-specific qualities and demands, experience-sharing may incentivize solution thinking based on common challenges faced across sectors and levels of the value chain;
▶ Collective action and methodological support are necessary, which requires active sharing of lessons learned and best practices from the industry to downstream users, associations, which can create value;
▶ Better cooperation along the supply chain can enable cost-intensive processes for greener alternatives to be pursued;
▶ Industrial policy is necessary for industrial development, including tax policy, bans, and standardization. In terms of domestic industrial policies, tax policy has most often been used as last resort and should be carefully considered to disincentivize less sustainable choices while incentivizing greener alternatives;
▶ The adoption phase is critical in the move towards safer substitution, as it challenges businesses without the capacity to implement them, potentially causing health and safety trade-offs.

COMMON GROUND

Shift to safer substitution is a multifaceted issue. Thus, a multi-approach solution, including the combined effort of regulations, clear frameworks and market signals to drive change, coupled with networks of support between countries and within countries, innovation, capacity building and financial support may provide the necessary ingredients to drive substitution in 2020 and beyond.
Panel 3 Transparency & Risk Communication

INTRODUCTION

Joined by four professionals from regulators, NGOs, social media and academia, ECHA Moderator Mr. Jukka Malm discussed the current best practices in place for tracking chemicals of concern to inform decisions relating to risk management measures, prevention of exposure and instructions for safe use and sustainable recycling. Also highlighted is the role of risk communication and transparency along the supply chain all the way to the end consumer.

IN A FEW WORDS

Risk communication and transparency are essential components of any regulatory system of chemicals management.

While there are various definitions of risk communication, ultimately all definitions provide information on health and environmental risks, their significance and their management. Risk communication can be executed through written, verbal or pictorial means, it may include a wide range of different sources of information and may involve many different types of organizations (ECHA).

Transparency refers to the responsibility of organizations that all interested parties have the ability to question, challenge and hold an organization and its management accountable for policies and decisions.

Traceability of chemicals of concern is an important element in creating market trust while complying with existing legal requirements and, a relevant risk communication task for national governments.
HIGHLIGHTS FROM KEYNOTE AND PANEL

► More data on chemicals is publicly available now than ever before: platforms such as ECHA's SCIP database of products or articles containing candidate list substances of very high concern and Korea's chorok-Nuri website are examples of a greater focus on traceability;

► By allowing for information on substances in articles to be accessible down in the supply chain, companies can be incentivized to take action and upgrade their systems, lowering chemical risks.

► Transparency is vital to build trust and confidence in the information and the role of the organization.

► Regular and consistent release of Information and two-way communication are crucial to managing hazardous chemicals.

► The speed of social media and constant access to sources of information pose a challenge as well as an opportunity for transparency and effective risk communications.

► As new platforms emerge, so do opportunities to communicate and effectively achieve bottom-up regulatory changes. Chinese company DaddyLab shared their experience in addressing chemical hazard concerns in everyday products through daily video content and live testing on social media platform TikTok. Social engagement led to higher accountability by authorities, driving regulatory updates and improved test standards.

► Finding ways to popularize scientific technological knowledge becomes vital. On TikTok, DaddyLab has reached 30+ million followers.

► To ensure active involvement from all relevant stakeholders, transparency efforts can be served by both offline as well as online formats. KCMA and Korea's MOE joint technical consultations during the designation of chemicals have been accessible to authorities, industry and NGOs and are available offline-online.

► Each country has their own system for risk communications and national circumstances determine priorities, especially since risks derived from chemical management are multi-faceted and have a direct impact on society.

► In accordance with Art.10 of Stockholm Protocol, information should be shared with the public. Nonetheless, concerns over privacy of data, as well as a perception of information-sharing as a burden still have a wide impact on transparency.

► A further setback to the promotion of transparency is associated to policies themselves, with a lack of coordination as to the reporting of information.

► Risk and hazard communications are not mutually exclusive; they usually apply to different situations. According to Chinese academia, industry and NGOs, there is however a tendency to first focus on gathering sufficient information to cover sufficient scenarios before the public is informed.

COMMON GROUND

Transparency is a dynamic process and one that should be integrated into work processes involving chemicals. Systems should allow for the monitoring and reporting of issues down the supply chain, which needs support from clear regulations.

Efforts are needed for a coordinated and open communication channel to exchange information and to determine areas where further research is needed to reduce chemical risks.

Countries have different risk communications priorities, yet there is a common guiding principle across regions in terms of transparency as an end-goal.