



International POPs Elimination Project

*Fostering Active and Efficient Civil Society Participation in
Preparation for Implementation of the Stockholm Convention*

Organisation and Holding of Public Hearings on Reorganisation of "Khimprom" Company in Ufa

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About the International POPs Elimination Project

On May 1, 2004, the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN <http://www.ipen.org>) began a global NGO project called the International POPs Elimination Project (IPEP) in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided core funding for the project.

IPEP has three principal objectives:

- Encourage and enable NGOs in 40 developing and transitional countries to engage in activities that provide concrete and immediate contributions to country efforts in preparing for the implementation of the Stockholm Convention;
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of NGOs to help build their capacity as effective stakeholders in the Convention implementation process;
- Help establish regional and national NGO coordination and capacity in all regions of the world in support of longer term efforts to achieve chemical safety.

IPEP will support preparation of reports on country situation, hotspots, policy briefs, and regional activities. Three principal types of activities will be supported by IPEP: participation in the National Implementation Plan, training and awareness workshops, and public information and awareness campaigns.

For more information, please see <http://www.ipen.org>

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The reason for the hearings

In 2005, Ufa residents commemorated the fifteenth anniversary of the phenol and dioxin accident, associated with phenol discharge of "Khimprom" plant in Ufa and poisoning of 670,000 city residents by drinking water, contaminated by chlorinated phenols. Now, "Ufakhimprom" Co. is in the midst of bankruptcy procedures but the site of its chemical plant is still a source of environmental pollution by dioxins and other toxic chemicals.

In order to discuss potential options of "Ufakhimprom" Co. reorganisation, and to co-ordinate design work and attract the attention of federal agencies and the Secretariat of the Stockholm Convention to the problem, the Union of Environmentalists of Bashkiria conducted public hearings on an assessment of the environmental impacts of "Ufakhimprom" Co. and discussed some conceptual options for the project.

The hearings were held on February 28, 2006 in the Public Reception Office of the Official Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in Privolzhskiy Federal District, with participation of top managers and specialists of 12 R&D facilities, representatives of the Ufa City Administration, 16 governmental supervisory bodies, 7 NGOs, 8 mass media outlets, as well as managers of "Ufakhimprom" Co. and former employees of the company.

Hearing testimony

Participants of the public hearings were informed on results of research studies on health impacts of dioxins. In particular, it was noted that the adverse impacts zone of "Ufakhimprom" plant covers the northern part of the city where several hundred thousand residents live. In addition, elevated dioxin levels were measured in blood samples of residents of Krasnaya Gorka Township, located downwind from the industrial area of Ufa. From the overall number of 128 former employees of "Khimprom" Co., who suffered chloracne, 50 persons are still alive but they were not officially recognised as victims of occupational health hazards.

The illegal dump of dioxin-containing waste is a source of continuous releases of these extremely toxic compounds. Now, the dump area is crossed by the so called Birskiy Road, Chernushinskiy and the Cheremushinskiy ponds.

The above contaminated areas are not fenced and as a result, the city residents have no idea of the risks of present there. The impact zone of "Ufakhimprom" covers several hundreds of small holdings, subject to eventual elimination. Now, owners of these small holdings cultivate crops and nobody controls quality of their products.

Participants of the public hearings acknowledged a high-principled position of the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Bashkortostan (RB). The prosecutors issued two resolutions on non-compliance with the due legislation and filed a lawsuit demanding termination of environmentally hazardous operations of the company.

Environmental impact assessment still needed

Many participants of the public hearings emphasised the role of non-governmental organisations in facilitation of actions to address the problem. However, it was revealed that the implementing agency has not even allocated the advance payment of RUR 20 million from the overall amount of RUR 70 million which is the planned cost of the environmental impact assessment of "Ufakhimprom" Co. As a result, work on the environmental impact assessment had been terminated. At the same time, without completion of the assessment, it would be impossible to develop a realistic plan of reclamation of the contaminated area and apply for the project financing.

Some participants said that scientists have been studying dioxin-related problems for 15 years, while not a single hectare of contaminated land has been cleaned so far - in other words, practical implementation of research results is lagging behind the need to protect human health and the environment.

Options for the site

Participants at the hearing agreed that the most optimal option for eliminating the pollution source would incorporate burial of the demolition waste, toxic sludge and the upper layer of contaminated soil (25 cm) in a specialised burial site within the territory of the plant.

Other proposals included one by the Centre of Environmental Technologies. They proposed to arrange treatment of the contaminated oil-containing sludge of "Ufakhimprom" by free transfer to another company ("Ufaneftekhim").

"Intekokm" Co. proposed processing 0.5 million tons of contaminated sludge using high temperature treatment in cement kilns. Note that Annex C of the Stockholm Convention lists cement kilns firing hazardous waste a potential source of dioxin and other POPs and describes them as having the potential, "for comparatively high formation and release of these chemicals to the environment." Any processing of the highly contaminated waste must utilize a method that does not generate more POPs or other hazardous chemicals.

Some participants of the hearings noted that some communication lines and production installations were not prepared for decommissioning and the Russian Technical Supervision Service should check the above information.

Results

Summing up the hearings, the participants decided to establish a commission for adjustment of the draft Recommendations and review of proposals submitted. However, they acknowledged the need to discuss the problem at a session of the State Commission for Emergency Response and to ask the Government of the Republic of Bushkiriya to approve a decree on decommissioning/liquidation of "Ufakhimprom" production facility. Such a decree should serve as the underlying legal act, allowing application for allocation of federal funds for environmental activities at the facility's site.

In order to implement the proposals of participants of the public hearings on public control of funds to be allocated to resolve the problem, the Union of Environmentalists of Bashkiria plans to implement a public environmental assessment of the project of decommissioning of "Ufakhimprom", as the work advances.

February 28, 2006
Ufa, Russian Federation

Recommendations of the Public Hearings on Elimination of Production Facilities of "Ufakhimprom" Company and Environmental Impact Assessment in the Course of Implementation of the Project

Having reviewed and discussed the environmental and health impacts of the production site of "Ufakhimprom" Co., participants of the public hearings think that the problem resembles an environmental disaster situation. However, no practical steps have been made in 15 recent years to clean the contaminated area. The situation has been further aggravated by the bankruptcy of "Ufakhimprom" Co. Initiatives of NGOs and research institutions facilitated by the Republic of Bashkiria include termination of production operations of "Ufakhimprom" Co. in 2005; decommissioning of production installations; and initiation of development of the project documentation for decontamination of the polluted area.

In addition, it is worth noting the high-principled position of the Inter-district Office of the Environmental Prosecutor of the Republic of Bashkortostan. The prosecutors issued resolutions on illegitimate decommissioning of "Ufakhimprom" and a lawsuit demanding termination of environmentally hazardous operations of the facility.

Accounting for the need to take adequate practical measures for implementation of the project of decontamination of the area polluted by highly toxic substances, participants of the public hearings consider the following recommendations appropriate:

1. To ask the government of the Republic of Bashkiria to review issues of implementation of environmental activities, stipulated by Decree No. 186 of the Republic of Bashkiria Cabinet of Ministers of May 22, 1995.; The government should approve a decree on decommissioning of "Ufakhimprom" Co., including a plan of actions to decontaminate sources of dioxins and other environmental pollutants at the territory of "Ufakhimprom" Co. and within its impact zone. In addition it should establish an inter-agency governmental commission to review problems of decommissioning of "Ufakhimprom" Co. with participation of representatives of research facilities and NGOs.

The above commission should review issues of drafting grant applications to international financial institutions for financing of the project of reorganisation of "Ufakhimprom" Co. In addition the commission should consider the incorporation of Mr. Alexander Veselov and Mr. Nikolai Churilov into the commission as representatives of Republic of Bashkiria NGOs.

2. To apply to the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation with recommendations to incorporate decontamination of "Ufakhimprom" Co. site, adjacent land

areas and water bodies, and utilisation of stockpiles of hazardous waste on the site into the Federal Program for implementation of Stockholm Convention on POPs (the program is under development now).

3. To attract attention of the Ministry of Finance and the Republic of Bushkiria Ministry of Natural Resources to the need to allocate funds for development and implementation of activities for reduction of dioxin pollution according to Program "Environment and Natural Resources of the Republic of Bushkiria for 2004 -2010."

4. To recommend the Ufa City Administration to conduct public hearings on proposed options for utilisation of demolition waste in the course of decommissioning of production sites, burial of sludge and contaminated soils on the site of "Ufakhimprom" Co.; and to complete delimitation of the "old dump" of dioxin-containing waste nearby the production facility.

5. To consider it appropriate to authorise State Facility "Bashgipneftekhim" to fulfil the function of the leading developer of the working project ("Elimination of Production Facilities of "Ufakhimprom" Co."), with the involvement of Environmental Centre of Bashkiria Republic, "Bashgiprovodkhoz" Co., State Facility "BZD R&D Institute" and specialists of other research and design organisations for collection of initial data.

6. To authorise the Union of Environmentalists of Bashkiria (with participation of research and design institutions) to develop and conduct (according to the Federal Law on Environmental Assessments) a public environmental assessment of project documentation on decommissioning of "Ufakhimprom" Co., prior to submission of the project to the state environmental assessment.

7. NGOs of the Republic of Bashkortostan should maintain public control of use of budgetary funds allocated for development of the environmental impact assessment project and implementation of the project of reorganisation of the facility.