



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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UN ‘SCIENTIFIC’ COMMITTEE TURNS POLITICAL – FAILS TO TAKE ACTION ON CANCER CAUSING CHEMICALS

(Geneva, Switzerland) The United Nations (UN) ‘scientific’ committee responsible for evaluating and recommending hazardous and persistent chemicals for global bans failed to take any action on a group of carcinogenic industrial chemicals that are also toxic to aquatic organisms. Ironically, the committee¹ agreed that short-chain chlorinated paraffins (SCCPs) are toxic, persistent, bioaccumulative and transboundary, and hence, candidates for a global ban under the Stockholm Convention on POPs. Despite meeting all scientific criteria, the committee decided to take no action on SCCPs. The committee has delayed action on these substances for the past six years.

“It appears that the committee once again delayed action because SCCPs are widely used – instead of focusing on their potential harms as obligated by the Stockholm Convention,” said Mariann Lloyd-Smith, IPEN. “That raises concerns about scientific integrity and whether commercial considerations are a higher priority than the Stockholm Convention’s goal of protecting human health and the environment.”

At the meeting of the scientific committee (14 – 19 October) the Chair invited proponents and opponents of actions on SCCPs to develop and present short papers justifying their position. China and Japan prepared a short paper outlining reasons to stop further actions. Canada, France, and Netherlands prepared a comprehensive paper outlining reasons to move forward to the next step of committee evaluation. In response, committee members disagreed about what to do.

“Some committee members claimed to have scientific uncertainty about SCCPs,” explained Dr. Lloyd-Smith. “However that is no excuse for inaction.”

¹ Known as the POP Review Committee (POPRC), the expert group that evaluates substances for addition to the Stockholm Convention

The Stockholm Convention clearly states that, ‘Lack of full scientific certainty shall not prevent the proposal from proceeding.’”

SCCPs are a concern for the health of Arctic ecosystems and peoples. Measured levels of SCCPs in Arctic fish, whale, seal and walrus are significant and the chemicals have been found in the breast milk of Arctic Indigenous women.

“Some Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic are among the most highly exposed people on earth to high levels of POPs as a result of dietary exposures, and SCCPs further add to the exposure” said Pam Miller, Alaska Community Action on Toxics. “The Committee should honor the Convention’s commitment to protect Arctic ecosystems and Indigenous Peoples.”

SCCPs are a group of toxic industrial chemicals used as lubricants in metalworking, paints, adhesives and sealants, plastics and rubber, and as flame retardants. There are real concerns for worker exposures in these uses and several countries have already banned them. SCCPs are also injected directly into the environment when used in fracking drilling fluids by the ever expanding gas industry. In 2007, there was a massive increase in China in the production of chlorinated paraffins, about the same time as the destructive process of unconventional gas hydraulic fracturing took off worldwide.

IPEN encourages governments to join the call for the scientific committee to take actions on SCCPs and operate within the obligations of the Stockholm Convention framework – a mechanism based on precaution with full respect for Arctic ecosystems and Indigenous Peoples.

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IPEN is a leading global organization working to establish and implement safe chemicals policies and practices that protect human health and the environment around the world. IPEN's global network is comprised of more than 700 public-interest organizations in 116 countries. Working in the international policy arena and in developing countries. www.ipen.org