
What you should know about the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management-(SAICM)

What is SAICM?

Between 70,000 and 100,000 chemicals may be already on the market with an estimated 1,500 new ones being marketed each year. Meanwhile chemical production is shifting from the developed to the developing world.

Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management or SAICM, the new initiative covers risk assessments of chemicals and harmonized labeling up to tackling obsolete and stockpiled products. It also carries provisions for national centres aimed at helping countries, especially in the developing world, train staff in chemical safety including dealing with spills and accidents.

This is a policy tool that was endorsed by over 100 governments, as well as public health environment advocacy, labor and health organizations, trade unions in February 2006, with the overarching SAICM goal to change how chemicals are produced and used in order to minimize their harmful effects on human health and the environment. The initiative is for globe on track to meet a commitment made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

SAICM was adopted by consensus. However, SAICM is not a legally-binding treaty. It does, however, constitute a global political commitment on the part of governments and others that recognizes health and environmental harms caused by chemical exposure and that pledges effective action to reform how chemicals are produced and used in order to minimize that harm.



A background image of a young girl with dark skin, smiling and holding a green apple. She is wearing a white shirt with orange and yellow stripes on the sleeves. The image is slightly faded to allow text to be read over it.

A Commitment to Achieving Chemical Safety

Overall objective of the SAICM is to: "achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle so that, by 2020, chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment."

In adopting the SAICM, governments and other participants in the International Conference on Chemical Management (ICCM) agreed that improved measures are needed to prevent harmful effects of chemicals on the health of children, pregnant women, fertile populations, the elderly, the poor, workers and other vulnerable groups and susceptible environments. They noted that some progress has been made in chemicals management, but declared that progress has not been sufficient globally, and that the environment worldwide continues to suffer from air, water and land contamination that impairs the health and welfare of millions. Overall objective of the SAICM is to: "achieve the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle so that, by 2020, chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment."

They declared their firm commitment to the Strategic Approach and its implementation and pledged to work with civil society and others in a spirit of solidarity and partnership to achieve chemical safety and thereby to assist in fighting poverty, protecting vulnerable groups, and advancing public health and human security.

The International Conference agreed that the need for action is heightened by a wide range of chemical safety concerns, including:

- a lack of capacity for managing chemicals in developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- dependency on pesticides in agriculture;
- exposure of workers to harmful chemicals; and
- concerns about long-term health effects.

It recognized that global production, trade and use of chemicals are rapidly increasing, and it agreed that this places a particular burden on developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It also agreed that the sound management of chemicals is essential to countries at all levels of development and that fundamental changes in the way that societies manage chemicals are urgently needed.

How it matters to us?

Sri Lanka has number of chemical manufacturers. However, Sri Lanka imports variety of chemicals including pesticides and industrial chemicals. These pesticide residues have negative environmental and health impacts. There is no clear information about the stockpiles of obsolete pesticides and chemicals.

Asbestos, lead in paint, Mercury, chromium products which use in tannery industry, lead in battery industry, cadmium pollution as a result of agrochemicals are some known issues. However, chemicals in the waterways are completely unknown.

Role of the Civil Society

NGOs and other civil society organizations in all regions have been actively campaigning in support of chemical safety for many years. In large part, the decision by governments and others to negotiate and adopt the SAICM can be seen as a response to pressures and demands from global civil society. It is well known, that lofty statements and agreements adopted at intergovernmental meetings do not, by themselves, solve the world's problems. Nonetheless, the SAICM is potentially very useful as a tool that civil society in all countries can utilize in their efforts to advance chemical safety objectives.

Be part of it?

There are NGOs and civil society organizations in most countries and in all regions who are already contributing to SAICM implementation, many without even knowing it. NGOs already working on chemical related policies and practices, Pesticides, waste disposal, International Treaties, Occupational health etc are already engage in the SAICM.

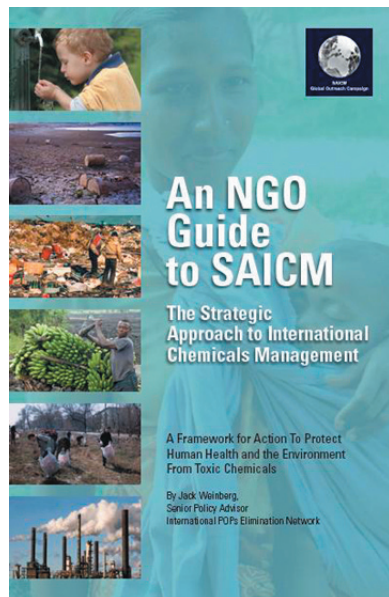
Although civil society activism can contribute to the achievement of SAICM's objectives, in the end, responsibility to protect human health and ecosystems from harms caused by toxic chemicals lies with governments. This requires establishing a national regulatory regime that is based on effective national or international policies, laws and regulations. It also requires the creation of adequate national regulatory infrastructures with sufficient laboratories, trained personnel and the authority to effectively monitor and enforce chemicals management laws and regulations.

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In the world today, few countries have established adequate national regulatory regimes sufficient to enable national achievement of SAICM's 2020 objective. Therefore, an important objective for NGOs and civil society organizations that wish to contribute to SAICM implementation is to work for the reform of national chemicals regulatory regimes.

There are four principles that can be used in working on SAICM 1) No Data, No Market; 2) the Right to Know; 3) the Substitution Principle; and 4) the Precautionary Principle; provide a useful starting point for NGOs working in any country to reform national chemicals management legislation and regulations.

An NGO Guide to SAICM: The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management produced by the IPEN presents ways that NGOs and civil society can make use of the SAICM.



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Centre for Environmental Justice/Friends of the Earth Sri Lanka is a member of the International POPs Elimination Network

