



Women in Europe for a Common Future | WECF

# Sustainable Chemistry – an NGO perspective

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# WECF – **W**omen in **E**ngage for a **C**ommon **F**uture

- International network with 150 member organisations in 50 countries
- Offices in D, NL, FR, CH, Georgia
- UNEP partner, ECOSOC status
- Co-Lead: Women Major Group UN SDGs



# Why is Sustainable Chemistry important now?

- Germany started an international initiative to include Sustainable Chemistry in a "future SAICM"
- Several papers present the German position about SC
- Several side events were conducted by the German government at UNEA2, 1<sup>st</sup> Interessional Meeting SAICM, Stockholm Convention (upcoming in April)
- ISC3 launch in May

# Policy

- Green chemistry is mentioned e.g. in the Dubai Declaration “We are determined to realize the benefits for chemistry, including green chemistry, for improved standards of living, public health and protection of the environment.”
- No reflection of Sustainable Chemistry in international policy on chemicals and waste

# IPEN paper for SAICM post 2030



a toxics-free future

## **Beyond 2020: Green chemistry and sustainable chemistry**

IPEN

January 2017

### **Introduction**

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) addresses significant health and environmental harms caused by chemical exposure and makes a global political commitment to reform how chemicals are produced and used in order to minimize those harms. Heads of State at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg called for the development of SAICM. While the agreement is not legally binding, its basic texts represent a consensus of Environment Ministers, Health Ministers and other delegates from more than one hundred governments who attended the first International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM1), held in Dubai, February 2006.

<http://ipen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Beyond%202020%20Green%20chemistry%20and%20sustainable%20chemistry%2024%20Jan%202017.pdf>

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Does Sustainable Chemistry  
help to achieve our goals as  
NGOs?

# NGO interest

NGOs working on chemicals often focus on the following topics:

- Reduction of exposure (capacity building, public awareness raising, clean up)
- Phase out and ban of hazardous chemicals (regulation)
- Safe substitution, safe non-chemical alternatives
- A precautionary system and strict regulation (regulation that includes polluter pays, reverse burden of proof, precautionary principle, right to know)



| Goals                                 | SC contribution                               | SC shortfalls   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Exposure reduction                    | - Intrinsically safe chemicals should be used | - Timeframe?<br>- No chemical alternatives in the focus<br>- No concept for clean up of hot spots |
| Capacity building                     | - Education, research                         | - Role of CEIT and developing countries?  |
| Public awareness raising              |   | - No focus on transparency, right to know, labelling  |
| Phase out, ban, regulation            | - Only if fully implemented                   | - No focus on regulatory system<br>- No mandatory elements  |
| Safe substitution                     | - Only if fully implemented                   | - No mandatory elements<br>- No focus on chemical alternatives                                    |
| Precautionary system, core principles |   | - Not mentioned   |



# Main critique

- SC has only been vaguely defined -> room for interpretation, including activities that do nothing to reduce harm
- SC is about the life cycle impacts of chemicals, it does not prioritize exposure and hazard reduction

# Main critique

- Trade offs against energy efficiency or other topics (e.g. mercury containing light bulbs, HBCD in insulation material)
- SC does not provide a solution for chemical legacy problems

# Main critique

- No mandatory elements are mentioned
- Voluntary self-declaration schemes of the chemical industry are not successful
- SC should not be a PR programme to promote what industry is already doing

# Main critique

- Governance and regulatory component is missing:

A precautionary system (regulation that includes polluter pays, reverse burden of proof, precautionary principle, right to know) and strict regulation is needed

...to achieve a push for SC (R&D, incentives, substitution, early warning system)

# What we need

- Precise definition of SC
- Exposure and hazard reduction should be top priority
- Strict regulation is key to achieve a transformation in chemical production
- Preserve Green Chemistry as a policy priority instead of Sustainable Chemistry

# What we need

- Companies that make authentic moves to safer chemicals need to participate in policy discussions
- Resources for CEIT and developing countries not only to manage dangerous chemicals, but to avoid them and design better ones
- Research funding needs to be directed to e.g. green chemistry

# What we need

- Non-chemical alternatives are equally important, e.g. agroecology
- Governments should create a real “level playing field” for industry
- We need ratings and benchmarks (e.g. GreenScreen) to assure that hazards are being reduced or avoided

# What we need

- Internalization of cost: at the moment most of the cost from hazardous chemicals (health, environment, surveillance etc) lies with society and taxpayers

The global chemical industry has an annual turn-over of approximately USD \$1.5 trillion per year (trillion = thousand billion). If, for example, a global cost recovery scheme recovers USD \$1.5 billion annually, the total burden on the chemical producing industry would come to 0.1% of the industry's annual turnover – one cent for each ten dollars in sales.



# Conclusions

- SC is not fit to function as overarching concept for a post SAICM policy framework
- Is SC just a trend, or a substantial concept that NGOs have to deal with in the future? Not clear, yet
- As NGOs we may want to develop a joint position to be ready for our advocacy work
- Until 2020 there will be more opportunities to present our joint position: ISC3 launch, SC side event at Stockholm COP8, 2<sup>nd</sup> intersessional meeting SAICM, OEWG SAICM

# Thank you for your attention!

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