

The Basel Convention for the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal

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An environmental Convention with fundamental sustainable development objectives

Goal: To protect, by strict control, human health and the environment against the adverse effects resulting from the generation and management of hazardous wastes and other wastes

World Summit Outcome document: by 2020, chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment

Bali Declaration (COP-9): The full implementation of the BC will contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In addition to improving health and livelihoods of citizens, full implementation will provide economic opportunities through the safe and efficient reduction, re-use, recycling, recovery, treatment and disposal of waste.

The two pillars of the Basel Convention

- Control system for transboundary movements of hazardous wastes based on the concept of **Prior Informed Consent** (Amendment to ban transboundary movements of hazardous wastes from OECD to non-OECD countries adopted 1995, not in force)
- Obligations to ensure the **environmentally sound management (ESM)** of hazardous and other wastes globally

The BC thus creates opportunities for developing markets for goods and services aimed both at **reducing** the generation of hazardous and other wastes and at conceiving, building, maintaining and operating **disposal** facilities for ESM, including the **recycling and resource recovery** of wastes.

The Basel Convention: facts and figures

- **172 Parties**
- **Wide scope:** “hazardous wastes”, “other wastes” and additional wastes defined as “hazardous” in Parties’ national legislation.
- **Many sectors of the economy** are concerned by its implementation:
 - industries dealing directly with HW management,
 - industries dealing with chemical production, energy generation, mining, leather production and tanning, electric and electronic equipment production and medical equipment manufacturers.
- **Waste generated:** based on the reports submitted by Parties (about half of the Parties report), around 170 mio. tons of BC wastes were generated in 2006; in addition, roughly 1/3 of TBM between developed and developing countries and 2/3 between developing countries.

Reducing the generation of waste and facilitating the safe and environmentally sound disposal of HW

- Classification of a waste as BC waste leads to specific waste management requirements. **ESM** means “taking all practicable steps to ensure that BC wastes are managed in a way which will protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects which may result from such wastes.”
- Parties to the BC have developed **technical guidelines** setting out the best practices for ESM of BC wastes (generation, disposal, recovery) for instance on ship breaking, electronic waste, used tyres and the production of Dioxins and Furans through the combustion of waste.
- The requirement of ESM coupled with the guidance on ESM **frame the market for environmental goods and services** aimed at reducing the generation of wastes and at their safe disposal and recovery.

Recycling and resource recovery as a business and employment opportunity

- Under the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) system of the BC, TBM of BC wastes may be authorized by the importing country in the event the wastes in question are required as a **raw material for recycling or recovery industries** in the State of import.
- Trade in recyclables is an increasingly growing market and many substances covered by the BC lend themselves to re-use, recycling or resource recovery. According to the reports submitted by Parties in 2006, **more than 7 mio. tons** of BC wastes were exported/imported for recovery purposes.
- Two examples: **End-of-life computing equipment and ship dismantling industry**
- Need for **protective measures** to ensure that damage to human health and the environment is prevented. The BC does provide for such safeguards and encourages other fora to strive towards this win-win-win situation where trade, environmental and social objectives are mutually supportive.

Hazardous waste is ever growing... so are market opportunities

- Little indication that the hazardous waste ever growing trend is about to shift in the near future.
- Today, hazardous and other BC wastes have a market value if they can be recycled or lead to resource recovery. This growing market however needs to be carefully framed to ensure that health and the environment are preserved.
- Tomorrow, waste stream-specific legally binding targets with concrete timetables, on the model of several of our sister MEAs, may well be the ultimate trigger to go from “hazardous waste is ever growing” to “hazardous waste is ever shrinking”.