



# **Supporting SAICM implementation through fighting toxic work**

**Unions for a sustainable  
management of chemicals**



ITUC CSI IGB

**sustainlabour**

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Supporting SAICM implementation through fighting toxic work: unions of a sustainable management of chemicals.

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# Chemical risks faced by workers need to be significantly reduced by 2020

**Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation**

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Tens of thousands of chemicals are used in workplaces without proper tests being carried out on the effects on health and the environment. Thousands are carcinogenic, mutagenic, toxic to reproduction, and are irritants. Many of these provoke illnesses and kill workers – workers who are only looking to earn their daily bread. Every minute a person dies from exposure to toxic substances at work. Out of the 160 million occupational illnesses per year, many are caused by chemical agents.

We witness an increased cancer rate in workers in electronics facilities; high blood levels of lead among workers at lead-acid battery manufacturing and recycling plants; flame retardant exposures among workers in electronic waste recycling; mercury poisoning among small-scale gold miners; asbestosis among workers employed in asbestos mining, milling, construction; acute and chronic pesticide poisoning among workers in agriculture all over the world. Construction and forestry workers face exposures to organic solvents, formaldehyde, isocyanates, pesticides including TBTO, PCP, and lindane.

Risks are wide and no sector is exempt. The official statistics indicate cancer is a largely blue collar, male concern. But endocrine disrupting chemicals have been implicated in the higher breast cancer rates found in women in a range of industries including agriculture, plastics, food packaging, metal manufacture and the bar and gambling industries.

In this context, this publication brings an important message. At the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, a goal was endorsed which is vital for workers everywhere: by 2020 all chemicals must be produced and used in ways that minimise significant adverse impacts on human health and the environment. We want governments to honour their commitments. There are five years left, and unions have proposals that could trigger the change. They are feasible and waiting for the political will to make them happen.

First of all, it will be wise to eliminate the most hazardous substances. By 2020 the world must be free of asbestos in all forms. Banning the most important industrial killer will mean basic international decency. Additionally, for those agricultural workers who produce our food in exchange for extremely insufficient salaries, we will also demand decisive action eliminating highly hazardous pesticides such as paraquat or endosulfan.

By 2020 we want also much more governmental attention fighting cancer at work and putting in place comprehensive regulations to protect workers against endocrine disruptors and nanotechnologies and nanomaterial risks. Coherent national occupational health regulations in every country accompanied by policies and practices that incorporate preventive approaches and full worker participation are a fundamental part of the equation. There are a few important ILO standards, such as 155, 170, and 139,

that governments should ratify and implement sooner rather than later.

Unions have been shown to be part of the solution. Studies show that unionised workplaces are safer and that deaths and diseases can be prevented when union reps are included on joint committees, when they are allowed to participate and when they are given the means, training and information they need.

In relation to this, the greatest challenge lies in front of our national, sectoral and company organisations. They have to find ways to be part of the joint companies and to exert our right to be informed on the substances we use, and to be protected from toxics at work.

At the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), we are committed to help them. In 2015 on the 28th of April, the international campaign

day when unions pledge to 'remember the dead, and fight for the living', the harm caused by workplace toxics was put under the spotlight.

This publication also recaps many successful examples of union endeavours to reduce worker chemical risks around the world. It aims to share interesting experiences on union solutions not only in Europe and North America, but also in Africa and Latin America.

We believe these are valuable examples of union contributions to SAICM. They are interesting cases that, if widely replicated, could significantly change the context, catalysing achievement of the goal by 2020 that chemicals be used and produced in ways that minimise adverse effects on human health and the environment. SAICM, an inclusive platform which engages multiple actors, is a key tool in driving this change.

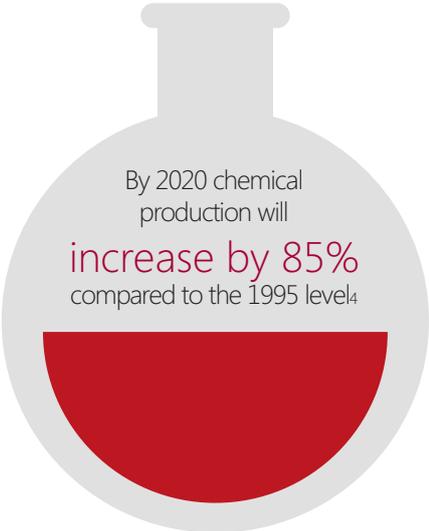
# WORKPLACE EXPOSURE: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

**248,000** substances exist in the market.<sup>1</sup>

**6,000** for which there is some information available.<sup>2</sup>

Less than **0.15%** of those used in the workplace have been tested for health and environmental effects.<sup>3</sup>

This is a growing problem



By 2020 chemical production will **increase by 85%** compared to the 1995 level.<sup>4</sup>

Diseases and death toll

**2.3 million** women and men around the world succumb to work related accidents or diseases every year.

**160 million** occupational diseases per year. Most of the occupational diseases in the list are caused by chemical agents.

**651,279** estimated death toll from hazardous substances per year

Source: ILO<sup>5</sup>

Almost **1 million deaths per year** are caused by hazardous chemicals exposures, with workers in all sectors at risk, from extractive industries, to processing industries and to end users. High risk industries include mining, chemical production, construction, shipbreaking and textiles. But workers in sectors like transport and fisheries face under-recognised risks. New industries like microelectronics and nanotechnology present proven and potentially new risks. And service industries – for example, cleaning and hairdressing – can present a range of deadly exposures every bit as deadly as those in manufacturing and mining.

Source: WHO<sup>6</sup>

1 Global Chemicals Outlook – Towards Sound Management of Chemicals. United Nations Environment Programme, 2013

2 Europe has the Global Harmonised System classifications for some 6000 chemicals in Annex VI to their CLP Regulations, ISTAS, 2013

3 From 120.000 chemical substances in the European market, the risk assessment has been completed for 181 substances (0.15%), ECHA <http://echa.europa.eu/>. The ratio of assessed substances is less favourable in the US. For example, in the US, the information identified as necessary by the OECD is available for 140 substances (7%) of the 3,000 substances that are commercialized in great volume (more than 500ton/year). UNEP, 2013

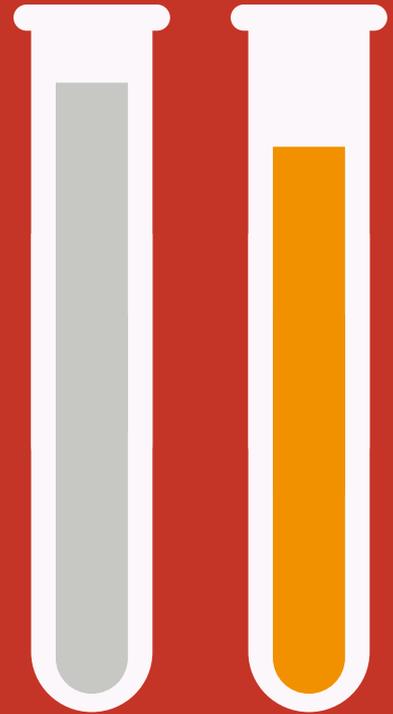
4 UNEP, 2013

5 ILO, 2011 ILO World Statistics

6 More than 1 million dead per year caused by limited number of chemicals or their mixtures for which data were available for the study includes for example chemicals involved in acute poisonings, occupational lung carcinogens and particulates, outdoor and indoor air pollution mixtures, lead, asbestos and arsenic. WHO (2004). Selected occupational risk factors. M. Concha-Barrientos et al, in Comparative quantification of health risks: global and regional burden of diseases attributable to selected major risk factors, 1651-1801. M. Ezzati et al. (eds.), WHO, Geneva.

# Points to remember

- **Statistics focus mainly on chemical accidents and massive or acute poisonings.**  
**However, they provide very little information on the 'chronic' occupational diseases like occupational cancer which can occur years after first exposure, or conditions like occupational asthma or pneumoconiosis which can only develop after prolonged exposure.**
- **We know that some substances should be avoided because they cause cancer, are dangerous to reproduction, damage the nervous system or cause other chronic effects.**
- **Chemicals do not affect everyone in the same way. There are differences which depend on gender, age and lifestyle.**
- **The combined effects of multiple exposures are mostly unknown. Some chemical and biological agents produce a synergistic (multiplied) effect with other substances when the exposures (or body burden) overlap.**



## PROPER LEGAL PROTECTION

- National laws must protect workers from chemical hazards and risks to their health and safety.
- Regulations must support workers' rights to fully participate in health and safety decisions via worker representatives and workers' representation on Joint health and safety committees, and worker representatives must be allowed paid time off for training and to undertake their union safety functions .
- Occupational health and safety labour inspections by official regulatory agencies should be frequent, properly resourced and should happen without interference.
- Occupational health, particularly the prevention of chronic diseases, should be treated as seriously as occupational injury and accident prevention
- Chemical risk reduction requirements should be included in legislation, and should include the workers' right to know what substances are in use, the hazards of the work and the implications for health and the environment.
- The precautionary principle ,the prevention principles and companies' liability for their environmental and health impacts should be enshrined in law.
- Negligent employers should face criminal and economic penalties, which must be sufficient to create a real deterrent effect
- The effective integration of health and safety considerations must be included in all public sector procurement processes.
- The ratification and implementation of relevant ILO standards such as 170, 155 and 139 is a key element.



# SAICM PROGRESS AND THE WAY FORWARD

When the International Conference on Chemicals Management agreed to action in 2006 under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) to challenge the harm caused by chemicals, it found a willing and able ally in the global trade union movement.

Trade unions were important actors in the discussions that led to the adoption of the Dubai Declaration of Chemical Management in 2006. Their representatives had been actively participating in the negotiations and preparatory meetings since 2002 and had helped to define the Overarching Policy Strategy and the Global Plan of Action. Union representatives acknowledged the importance of an international framework for the regulation of chemicals and offered their ability and disposition for an international multistakeholder forum that could drive solutions and joint actions at both national and workplace levels.

In recent years, we have witnessed advances in occupational health and safety legislation in many countries where clauses on chemical management have been introduced. On many occasions unions have been active participants in these changes.

Even though progress has been made in some areas, significant adverse health and environmental effects associated with toxic chemical exposure still need to be addressed.

Workers' health and workers' lives are still in danger due to an unsustainable management of chemicals, a lack of information on the substances they are using, a lack of workplace risk prevention policies for chemicals management, a lack of appropriate regulation and even when this is in place, a lack of compliance. Currently, in many countries unions are very important actors in improving protection for chemical workers. In many other countries, unions lack resources, training, information or proper recognition for their tasks. It is time to speed up change.

## **What can unions do? Trade unions can be important drivers of this change by acting at multiple levels**

- **National centres:** highlighting the importance of this issue, advocating for improvements in the law on hazardous substances and improved enforcement of the law, and by exposing preventable chemical risks that workers face

- **Sectoral federations:** educating the membership on risks in their industries, promoting - when possible - sectoral agreements on hazardous substances, and encouraging unions to include this issue in collective bargaining.
- **Unions at the company and workplace level:** mobilising for Joint occupational health and safety (OHS) committees to address hazardous substances, bringing this issue to the union's collective bargaining agenda, improving union capacity through effecting organisation and training, and fighting for workplace rights.

Even where good legislation exists, and committees are in place, unions have to mobilise for their rights in order to be effective, and provide workers' representatives with information and support to encourage them to:

- Identify biological and chemical hazards, ensure risks are eliminated or controlled.
- Carry out regular inspections for exposure to chemical, biological and physical hazards within their workplaces
- Fully participate in any risk assessments, and in the development of any control strategies.
- Conduct investigations or research following workers' complaints or concerns, illnesses, injuries, and identify necessary preventive measures.
- Have access to all data on accidents and diseases
- Undertake regular consultations with members to identify possible work-related health issues
- Develop an inventory of hazardous substances at the workplace

### **A SAICM that works for workers Strengthening occupational health and safety**

The SAICM Global Plan of Action has given occupational health and safety a relevant space in

the sustainable management of chemicals and at the national level progress has been made. However union experience suggests ministries of labour and national occupational health institutes should revitalize their participation in activities towards 2020. Very often policies are being carried out in isolation. In order to revitalize the labour sector, the ILO should review its progress and priorities towards achieving the 2020 goal of sound management of chemicals, and in line with the actions identified in the SAICM Global Plan of Action. Clear indicators have to be identified.

Likewise, unions are asking the ILO for an update of existing OHS guides, a campaign for ratification and implementation of relevant standards and a strong push for improving data collection mechanisms/OSH statistics.

In order to brief workers, the Global Harmonized System must not only be implemented in a timely manner, but also has to reach workplaces. For the millions of people without Internet access and for those who do not understand the majority languages, there is no access to this chemical information.

Trade unions are aware that their involvement is key. Achieving progress on better regulating occupational health is often due to union pressure at the national level and unions have to redouble efforts to ensure that chemical risk prevention provisions in national legislation are implemented.

### **Better action orientation through concrete targets**

In order to become a forum that can meet specific goals by 2020 and to be consistent with the Global Plan of Action and the Overall Orientation and Guidance, trade unions encourage targeting a number of countries in risk reduction activities. These activities include:

- Developing quantitative targets for phasing out the manufacture, import, sale and use of highly hazardous pesticides,
- encouraging strong public and occupational health and environmental protection policies on EDCs,
- supporting national biomonitoring and health surveillance of workers who manipulate nanomaterials,
- promoting legally-binding controls on hazardous chemicals in e-products,
- ensuring enforcement on workers' "right to know" policies.

### **Adequately financed**

Results depend on the resources available to both countries and actors who are willing to act. Developing countries, especially the least developed, need adequate financing to control and reduce risks. In some countries, funded programs have been deployed that can be built upon to move forward. It is now time to work together and multiply our outreach to all countries, which essentially means multiplying the available funding.

Similarly if the multistakeholder approach of the Strategic Approach is to be maintained it should be reflected in the financing tools. The Special Program is called on to finance future national and regional activities on the sound management of chemicals. In so doing, it will have to finance the activities of those actors with greater difficulties in getting resources: NGOs, trade unions, small farmers, indigenous peoples, women's organizations, etc. If the financial instruments do not take a multistakeholder approach, the valuable contributions of these groups may never materialize.

### **Enhancing the participation of unions and other actors**

SAICM, with its pro-active, inclusive and overarching

platform for the engagement of multiple stakeholders, provides a unique participatory approach to addressing chemicals and waste which is the Strategic Approach.

Its strategy of enhancing stakeholder participation is essential. Unions will call on governments to involve all stakeholders in consultations on national regulation and to properly monitor to ensure compliance.

Unions recognise that they must offer stronger support to this awareness-raising, and that new information technologies have opened up new possibilities. However, union ability to become more involved in the sound management of chemicals at the national level will depend not only on their own mobilization, but specifically on the national government's will to ensure that they are included in the discussions, and that they are not persecuted for trying to be involved at the company level. For countries with labour legislation that recognizes the workers' right to be informed of substance risks and their proper management, labour inspection has to ensure compliance. Unions will be key allies in this task. For those countries that have not included this type of legislation yet, they have to speed up their approval towards 2020.



# Key trade union goals towards 2020

## **Eliminating the most hazardous substances**

If we want to achieve a more sustainable management of chemicals, the most significant risks for workers' health have to be eliminated, such as asbestos, and highly hazardous pesticides such as paraquat or endosulfan.

**Unions will fight for an asbestos free world by 2020.** The World Health Organisation estimates the annual death toll from asbestos-related diseases at 107,000 deaths each year. This means one person dies as the result of asbestos every five minutes. And this is an underestimate of the real toll.

**Decent work in agriculture includes the elimination of highly hazardous pesticides.** It is calculated that in any year around 3% of agricultural workers suffer from acute intoxication from pesticides. There is no global data for chronic diseases but recent evidence suggests that long-term exposure to pesticides – even those considered relatively safe-is responsible for a large number of occupational diseases.

## **Zero cancer: Occupational cancer has to be reduced**

At least 1 in 10 cancers – and this is a conservative estimate – are the result of preventable and predictable workplace exposures.

More people face a risk of occupational cancer today than at any other time in history. Regrettably, however, most of them are just not aware of it. Unions will campaign for workplace risk prevention in a holistic approach: through the identification of possible hazardous substances used at the workplaces, proper registration of cases of toxicity, better workplace health monitoring, removal and substitution of the most dangerous substance and improving our understanding of exposure limits.

## **Comprehensive regulations to protect workers against endocrine disruptors and nanotechnologies and nanomaterial risks**

Endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) are causing a variety of occupational diseases, including

hormone-sensitive cancers and developmental effects in the children of workers. Many groups of workers – particularly women workers- are being affected. Awareness raising activities to target them are necessary. International endeavours for worker protection on nanotechnologies and nanomaterials have to be supported.

### **Time to ratify the ILO standards**

Unions will also seek further ratification and implementation of ILO standards at the national level, from OHS conventions with provisions on hazardous substances, such as 155, to specific standards such as 170 on chemicals or 139 on cancer. For sectors with very important risks, there are also relevant conventions such as 184 for agriculture, 176 for mines or 167 for construction .

### **Information is needed**

A key union demand is for a major push on statistics – to get a count of workplace injuries, diseases and deaths. The absence of reliable statistics is a real omission as it stops policy development.

Reliable information is required so that progress can be tracked against the SDGs and the ILO should lead on this task

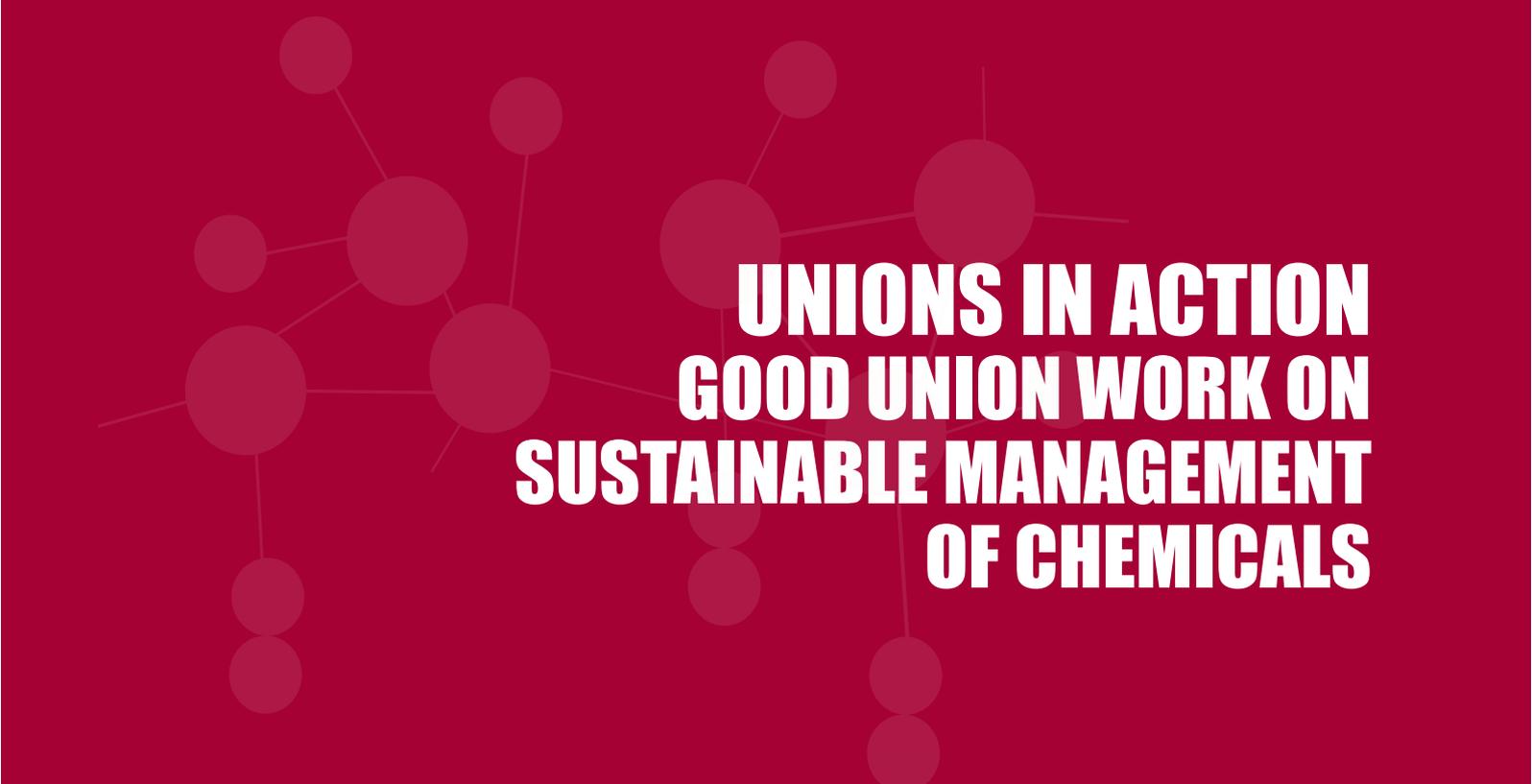
### **A matter of workers' rights**

**Participation and consultation:** Workers demand the right to participate in, and be fully consulted on, health and safety programmes and procedures where they work. This means having involvement in all aspects of health and safety management, including chemical management. Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSC) have been shown to be an effective way to improve conditions. However, union representatives can only be effective when they listen to and are informed and supported by their membership – and this

means union representatives should encourage members to participate in identifying problems and solutions, and unions should provide their representatives with the necessary training, support and resources.

**Right to know:** Workers must have a right to know the hazards of what they are using, including impacts on their health and the environment. This means proper labelling, complete and up-to-date material safety data sheets, and capacity building (education and training) on chemical, biological or physical hazards along with how to do their jobs with minimal risk.

**Right to refuse:** Workers must be able to exercise in good faith a right to refuse or stop dangerous work. Anyone doing this must be protected from discipline, dismissal, or other negative outcomes. Therefore there must be a legal whistleblower protection and protection from victimization or 'blacklisting'.



# UNIONS IN ACTION GOOD UNION WORK ON SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS

## **ITUC 28 April 2015 CAMPAIGN: toxic work – stop deadly exposures today**

The International Workers' Memorial Day or International Commemoration Day (ICD) for the Dead and Injured takes place annually around the world on April 28. This is an international day of remembrance and action for workers killed, disabled, injured or made unwell by their work.

Every year the ITUC and the Global Union Federations choose an occupational health and safety issue and raise awareness of it with their members. In 2015 the theme chosen was reducing toxic exposures at the workplace. An ITUC guide, 'Toxic work – stop deadly exposures today'<sup>1</sup>, was launched to explain how to remove toxic exposures from the workplace to worldwide members. At the centre of the union strategy lies an active, union-supported, workforce participation, and this happens by finding problems and implementing solutions.

This campaign was widely followed at the national

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ituc-csi.org/toxic-work-stop-deadly-exposures>

level. The ACV-CSC in Belgium ran a campaign in French and Dutch in all Belgian companies with workers representatives and some SMEs on the safe use of dangerous substances and employers and workers obligations. In the Netherlands the FNV demanded the recognition of chronic solvent-induced disease victims. In Argentina the CGT raised awareness through its assemblies. In the UK the TUC disseminated the results of an on-line survey on hazardous substances at the workplace which they had carried out in the previous months.

The International Trade Union Confederation ITUC represents 176 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 328 national affiliates. <http://www.ituc-csi.org/>

## **Focusing on cancer: Global Federations for Zero Occupational Cancer**

In 2007, global unions, such as IndustriALL, BWI and ITUC launched a 'Zero cancer' campaign<sup>2</sup>, which spawned activities and policy initiatives from

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.industrial-union.org/archive/imf/preventing-occupational-cancer>

Australia to Spain. It established that, far from being a won battle, exposure to industrial carcinogens was still widespread and affected workers from cleaners to nurses to miners.

In order to prevent occupational cancer, which is the most common work-related cause of death, a guide was published for reps: Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A union guide to prevention.<sup>3</sup>

The guide calls on union representatives to, firstly, identify possible cancer risks in the workplace and, then, to seek removal or substitution of those substances or processes which present a cancer risk with less hazardous substances or safer working methods. It sets trade union priorities for action to deal with risks: elimination; substitution; control; and if nothing else is possible, personal protective equipment such as masks or protective clothing.

The campaign involved 11 global trade union organisations who together represent over 300 million members in more than 150 countries. <http://www.global-unions.org/?lang=en>

### **IUF Improving occupational health, safety and environmental standards on plantations and farms in Africa**

In 2006, the IUF started a project on Global Strategies in Health and Safety with the support of Swedish unions in Africa, specifically, in Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria and, more recently, Liberia and Cameroon. The project has trained numerous workers on OHSE issues, and hazardous chemicals comprise an important part of the training.

Results are remarkable. Workers are much more

aware of the need to avoid using toxic chemicals wherever possible. Where this cannot be achieved, many of them know that they must stay out of high risk areas and wear proper personal protective equipment (PPT). Unions are much more actively voicing demands for a sustainable management of chemicals with their companies' management.

For example in Malawi, the sugar plantation union SPAWUM has made the handling of chemicals a big priority. After meetings with the management, they have improved spraying techniques for pesticides. The union reports a big drop in cases of allergic reaction.

Meanwhile on the tobacco estates in Malawi, the union TOAWUM also reports that chemicals are now used with much greater care. In Uganda, over the years, the union NUPAWU has succeeded in getting companies to change the chemicals they are using.

Reporting has become more regular. In Zambia, for example, the union NUPAAW now keeps a database of accidents, and compiles data that comes in from its regions and branches. In Nigeria, the AAEUN has developed a better system of Çdata-gathering by local union structures and field staff, including on-the-spot assessments for risk analysis. In Uganda, NUPAWU has taken several cases to court where workers have been badly affected by toxic chemicals.

The project particularly targets women workers. IUF reports greater awareness among women workers of the impact of some chemicals, particularly on their reproductive health<sup>4</sup>.

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), is composed of 408 affiliated organizations in 126 countries and represents a combined membership of around 2,6 million. <http://www.iuf.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sustainlabour.org/documentos/2015%20Safe%20Farms,%20Safe%20Workers.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bwint.org/pdfs/ZeroCanceENr.pdf>

## **Prioritizing substances and calling companies to action: impressive work around REACH from the European Trade Union institute**

Europe's trade unions benefit from their own safety thinktank, the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI)<sup>5</sup>, which not only provides top level advice on chemical risks, it also keeps a keen eye on looming threats to chemical safety standards and the regulatory process (REACH, CLP, Carcinogens Directive, Chemical Agents Directive, etc).

A very important example of this work is the creation of the Trade Union priority list for REACH authorisation. The purpose of the Trade Union Priority List was to contribute to the practical implementation of REACH, in particular the authorisation procedure by proposing Substances of Very High Concern (SVHC) which, from a union perspective, should be prioritised for inclusion in the Candidate List and potentially in the Authorisation List<sup>6</sup>.

The list included 334 entries and covered 585 high production volume chemicals which were widely used at work and linked to occupational diseases. 24 out of 31 substances of very high concern (SVHC) that were included in the official authorisation list were already on the trade union list beforehand.

However ETUI work is also very important with regards to mobilizing trade unions in companies to facilitate the implementation of new legislation by, for example, informing management who may be unaware of their obligations under REACH and CLP. Its most recent campaign calls on worker representatives to act as ambassadors for REACH in their companies.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.etui.org/Topics/Health-Safety>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/TUListREACH.pdf>

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was founded in 1973. It now represents 90 trade union organisations in 39 European countries, plus 10 European Trade Union Federations. <https://www.etuc.org/>

## **ISTAS- CCOO Spain - A pioneer in all arenas: research, training, risk reduction, substitution, etc.**

The union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), supported by its institute ISTAS, has been - most probably for decades - the trade union with the highest technical capacity on hazardous substances risk reduction worldwide.

Activities and guidelines for union delegates have been updated to adapt them to new risks and new opportunities for trade union action under new legislation. In the last decade more than 1,000 representatives have been directly trained by ISTAS on chemical risk. However they also provide the training materials. Here is a list of some of the trade union representative guides developed by them: Trade union Guide for chemical risks prevention at the workplace<sup>7</sup>, Trade union guide for the substitution of hazardous substances in the workplace<sup>8</sup> Trade union guide for hazardous waste management and control<sup>9</sup>, Trade union guide to controlling and managing company emissions<sup>10</sup>, Trade union guide to eliminate PCBs. Endocrine disruptors<sup>11</sup>, Guide for the new Regulation on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures<sup>12</sup>. ISTAS coordinates a network of more than 100 technical advisers on prevention of occupational hazards and offers them technical training, action protocols, information and support for their

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.istas.net/web/abreenlace.asp?idenlace=1367>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.istas.net/web/abreenlace.asp?idenlace=7843>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.istas.net/web/abreenlace.asp?idenlace=2420>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.istas.net/web/abreenlace.asp?idenlace=2262>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.istas.net/web/abreenlace.asp?idenlace=145>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.istas.net/web/abreenlace.asp?idenlace=7620>

activities, etc. In the last decade, ISTAS has organized 12 trainings specifically on chemical risk for them. Information from the advisors network provides important feedback so that workplace risks in Spain can be mapped and, hence, allows to reduce these risks. In the last 15 years, this network of advisers has answered close to 10,000 different queries on hazardous chemicals.

ISTAS has created some interesting tools for workers such as RISCTOX, a database of 100,000 hazardous substances. It was developed to provide clear, organized and concise information about health and environmental risks caused by chemicals contained in products which are generally used or handled in companies.

ISTAS' work has also managed to achieve concrete success in the area of substitution. It was one of the organizations that created SUBSPORT<sup>13</sup>, a free-of-charge, multilingual platform for information exchanges on alternative substances and technologies. The ISTAS team and CCOO reps have managed to drive substitution experiences of hazardous chemicals in diverse companies. Their experiences include among others trichloroethylene in a rubber producer, dangerous solvents in an automotive factory, lead in a glass factory, identification and substitution of POPs, substitution of mutagen TGIC (1,3,5-tris oxiranylmethyl)-1,3,5-triazine-2,4,6-(1H,3H,5H)-trione in the installation of metallic furniture, endocrine disrupting epoxy resins in a car-painting company, octamethylcyclotetrasiloxane used as a polisher for oranges, a cleaning product based on didecyldimethylammonium-chloride and alcohol ethoxylate in a nursing home<sup>14</sup>. Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) has more than one million members and 120,000 delegates across Spain [www.ccoo.es](http://www.ccoo.es), [www.istas.ccoo.es](http://www.istas.ccoo.es)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.subsport.eu/about-the-portal>

<sup>14</sup> Catalogue of trade union substitution experiences. ISTAS 2009. <http://www.istas.ccoo.es/descargas/Cat%C3%A1logo%20de%20experiencias%20sindicales%20de%20sustituci%C3%B3n.pdf>

## PIT CNT plans to train more than 50% of chemical workers in Uruguay

The Uruguayan trade union (PIT-CNT)<sup>15</sup> and its affiliate of chemical sector workers (STIQ) are committed to making workplaces safer. Workers' training has been a permanent activity since PIT-CNT Security and Hygiene Commission was formed, over 30 years ago.

Through an agreement with the Chemical Industries Association of Uruguay (ASIQUR), they are now targeting 1,400 workers (more than 50% of total industry workers) in a program supported by the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (INEFOP)

This project can be broken down into two main strands:

- Training up technical staff for companies along with preparing safety data sheets and labels in accordance with the EMS standards; ASIQUR, in agreement with STIQ, selects teachers for these courses.
- Training up 1,400 workers from STIQ sectors (Chemical Industry, Paints, Perfumery and cosmetics, Veterinary products and Rubber) on the safe handling of chemical substances.

The course -a total of 50 hours- includes 7 modules (characterization of chemicals; effects on health and the human body; general prevention principles; safe practices in managing chemicals; GHS for classification and labelling; effects on the environment; legal regulations). It is held by workers and technical personnel from STIQ, and supported by University academics. The first stage has already been completed and included nearly 200 workers from Montevideo.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.pitcnt.uy/>

PIT CNT: Plenario Intersindical de Trabajadores – Convención Nacional de Trabajadores is the national trade union center in Uruguay. 30% of workers in Uruguay are PIT CNT union members. They count on the technical help of Instituto Cuesta Duarte. <http://www.pitcnt.uy/>

### **Sustainlabour QSP experiences in Latin America**

Protecting workers from potential impacts of chemicals on their health has always been one of Sustainlabour's key priorities.

Its most successful experiences have been carried out with the support of the Quick Start Programme (QSP) from SAICM. Projects have shown that change at the workplace is possible through helping to train workers and their representatives in countries like Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Uruguay<sup>16</sup>.

Sustainlabour projects raised awareness on chemical risks among workers and provided them with general information and tools to get more detailed information. Another important angle was strengthening national regulation: identifying areas for regulation improvement at the country level and demands for unions to present to their government.

Project outcomes were numerous: distribution of training guides for unionists, 6 National Reports on chemical management and OHS, organization of 3 big multistakeholder forums on sustainable management of chemicals, 10 trade union teams created or strengthened at the national level, more than 1,200 unionists trained, and the campaigns have reached more than 60,000 workers. Particular attention was paid to the most vulnerable workers, such as waste

pickers. In some companies, chemical risk provisions were introduced into collective agreements, and substitution of hazardous substances was achieved.

Participants came from a wide range of sectors including: agriculture, the pharmaceutical and chemical industry, paper mills, tanneries, fish farming, the rubber industry, plastic factories, ports and airports, cleaning, commerce, health, maquilas, metallurgy, mining, public administration, street vendors, waste picking and recycling.

Sustainlabour is a labour Foundation that has worked with unions from all regions of the world on the sustainable management of chemicals for 10 years. <http://www.sustainlabour.org/index.php?lang=EN>

### **United Steelworkers (USW) putting breast cancer out of work**

In partnership with the BlueGreen Alliance (an alliance that unites the largest union and environmental organizations), the USW launched a campaign to Put Breast Cancer Out of Work. Through this initiative they aim to prevent breast cancer and other chronic diseases by promoting safer alternatives to the currently used dangerous chemicals.

Their approach is a new curricula for reps to talk at workplaces about the role of chemicals in breast cancer and other chronic diseases; to build coalitions with other trade unions, environmentalists and women's health groups to raise public awareness of the role of chemicals in breast cancer; to work for new policies that regulate chemicals using examples of what cities, states and leading companies are doing; and to equip workers and their employers to join the do-it-yourself safer chemicals effort to prevent harmful exposures that lead to disease<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.sustainlabour.org/programas.php?lang=EN&i-programa=9>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.chemhat.org/uswbga-program>

Unions have also created the ChemHAT.org<sup>18</sup> database, a Chemical Hazard and Alternatives Toolbox database designed to offer up easy to use information on how to protect workers and families against the harm that chemicals can cause.

The United Steelworkers is North America's largest industrial union. It includes 1.2 million members and retirees in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean. <http://www.usw.org/>

### **In Rio Negro, Argentina: Unionized teachers looking out for better health and a clean environment for their communities**

The Union of Education Workers of Río Negro (known by the initials unTER from their Spanish name: la Unión de Trabajadores de la Educación de Río Negro) addresses environmental issues through the Chico Mendes Socio-Environmental Department. UnTER is currently carrying out a wide number of activities related to the issue of chemicals:

- A campaign demanding the remediation of a lead-contaminated site in San Antonio Oeste, along with petitioning the Lead Multisectoral. After more than ten years of different activities, the provincial and national governments are starting to undertake remediation tasks.
- Epidemiological surveys in rural schools. Results should include the detection of agrochemical contamination related diseases. The survey is being carried out by UnTER's Department of Health and in conjunction with "Health Mobility" ("Movil de salud" in Spanish)<sup>19</sup>. To date, approximately 70% of target schools have been visited through the project and been taught

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.chemhat.org/about-chemhat/how-use-chemhat>  
<sup>19</sup> <http://www.unter.org.ar/taxonomy/term/5101>

about improving handling, removal/replacing of hazardous substances in schools (specifically for cleaning and disinfection products).

- Permanent support for communities affected by Fracking: tracking spill complaints, analysis of water samples in areas near wells, etc.
- A project on analyzing soil and water samples around schools which are close to areas where hydrocarbons and agriculture are exploited.<sup>20</sup>

UNTER has a membership rate of around 90% (15,000 members) and a body of more than 700 union delegates working directly in schools.

### **The International Transport Workers' Federation's (ITF): Thinking inside the Box**

Container safety is an issue for port workers, seafarers, truck drivers and railway workers - the workers are in direct contact with the containers along the transport chain. But it's also a serious concern for managers, schedulers and warehouse operators, who also form part of the chain of responsibility. Accidents can be fatal.

They can happen at any stage of the transport chain - and it's not just transport workers who are at risk of injury, members of the public can be hurt too.

The International Transport Workers' Federation's (ITF) road transport, railway, dockers and seafarers sections are running a cross-sectional campaign on container cargo safety which started in 2014 and will run until 2018. Its primary aim is for safety and responsibility on transportation with three main areas of focus: improper packing of containers; misdeclaration of goods or weights; and toxic gases and fumigation in containers<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://unter.org.ar/node/13319>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.itfglobal.org/en/transport-sectors/railways/in-focus/container-safety/>

containers; misdeclaration of goods or weights; and toxic gases and fumigation in containers<sup>1</sup>.

Around 700 unions, representing more than 4.5 million transport workers from 150 countries, are members of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

<http://www.itfglobal.org/en/global/>

### **Enhancing knowledge of union safety reps: the Hazards Magazine**

Hazards magazine is a straightforward resource for UK trade union safety reps, and is intended to provide news and accessible do-it-yourself tools to evaluate and remedy health and safety problems at work. There is a clear underpinning principle – when it comes to threats to our health at work, information alone changes nothing; it is trade union organisations that convert information into power and then power into action.

But Hazards<sup>2</sup>, a not-for-profit run for the most part by unpaid labour health and safety activists, has a wider purpose. From the outset – it has been in existence for four decades – it recognised that examples of best practice had to be harvested from labour activities worldwide.

So participatory research techniques honed in Latin America were promoted. Best chemical standards and substitution practices were sought from unions, labour groups and labour sympathetic academics worldwide. Strategies and resources were showcased. And health and safety struggles were highlighted wherever they occurred – in the most literal sense, Hazards promotes the idea that an injury to one is an injury to all. In an age where most of the world's largest economies are global companies, not countries, this has never been truer.

In the days before the internet became a powerful communication tool, Hazards built networks and information exchange channels. In 1997 it published an International Directory of Workers' Health and Safety Contacts. For a decade it published the Workers' Health International Newsletter (WHIN) which spurred the creation of regional and international networks and which continue today. These are organised around labour approaches to health and safety in general or about specific issues – hazards, standards, regulatory approaches and organising strategies.

<http://www.hazards.org/about hazards/>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.itfglobal.org/en/transport-sectors/railways/in-focus/container-safety/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hazards.org/>



**September, 2015**

**Supporting SAICM implementation through fighting toxic work: unions of a sustainable management of chemicals.**

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