



“Accelerating actions for a resilient Blue Pacific”

7th, 8th, 9th September 2021, Virtual Platforms
12:00pm – 5:00pm Samoa Standard Time

Agenda Item 8.3.2: Strategic Planning and Management of Hazardous Waste

Purpose of the paper

1. To highlight the opportunities to strengthen awareness and management of hazardous wastes in the Pacific due to the significant and detrimental impacts of inappropriate management of mercury, asbestos, and healthcare waste which pose a significant and on-going risk to the people and environment of the region.
2. To introduce the proposed ‘Mercury Free Pacific Campaign’ and seek support for its development.
3. To seek endorsement of the ‘Asbestos Management Legislative Reform Pathway’ that is derived from the Asbestos Management Code of Practice and Policy Note to ban the importation of asbestos containing materials.
4. To seek support in creating and funding of a ‘Healthcare Medical Waste Investment Plan’ for the ongoing maintenance of healthcare waste management infrastructure.

Background

5. Pacific island countries and territories have limited capacity to appropriately receive, use, store and transport hazardous materials imported into their countries. Limited access to regional hazardous waste management facilities means that in most cases, the end-of-life hazardous materials are released to the environment, which poses imminent and on-going risks to both human and environmental health.
6. Countries have existing mechanisms suitable to manage hazardous wastes such as legislations to ban importation nationally, and agreements to ban importation regionally, which are supported through national capacity building, awareness, and education activities. Additionally, countries could also implement legislative mechanisms to restrict, control and manage the impact of hazardous wastes through implementing national legislation to ensure the safe use, handling, storage, disposal of these products.

7. The management of hazardous wastes that pose significant risk to human and environmental health have been discussed in past SPREP Meetings, including discussions on bans on the importation of these products which are currently the focus of donor funded projects implemented by SPREP.

Asbestos management

8. The European Union Funded PacWastePlus programme (PacWastePlus) has continued the initial asbestos management work conducted by the PacWaste project and is implementing several activities that will actively remove asbestos materials in several countries and provide strong legislative and management tools to all countries to assist with the active and ongoing management of asbestos. Specific actions include:
 - a. Asbestos abatement work in Kiribati (specifically on Banaba Island) to safely package, transport and dispose of asbestos from the island.
 - b. Asbestos abatement work in Nauru, Niue, and Tonga, highlighting best practices for safe packaging and removal of asbestos stockpiles from derelict tar-tanks and several government managed sites.
 - c. Assessment of buildings in outer islands of Tuvalu and areas in Papua New Guinea to determine if they have asbestos containing materials present.
 - d. Development and delivery of appropriate training for customs officials, and others on identification, the safe handling and abatement of asbestos, and the implementation of any specific legislative instruments implemented in country.
 - e. Development and release of awareness and education materials to assist communities to reduce adverse impacts and disease from legacy asbestos and asbestos containing materials.
9. PacWastePlus has developed an ***Asbestos Management Legislative Reform Pathway*** (refer WP.8.3.2/Att.1) that clearly identifies the steps necessary to institute bans on asbestos. This Pathway utilises and summaries the various work undertaken such as: an analysis of legislative options for the management of asbestos, development of a guidance note / brief on the issues, and a Policy Note to guide the drafting of National legislation to impose a ban on the importation of asbestos. The development of these resources is in direct response to the outcomes of previous SPREP Meetings requesting specific assistance to manage asbestos and ban its importation to the region.
10. The Policy Note guides the development of appropriate legislative instruments to ban asbestos and asbestos containing materials. It provides the principles and the necessary outcomes or actions that should be managed, so that drafters can develop the appropriate words and instrument that suits their national situation. The Policy Note contains a discussion of all relevant legal options available to execute the asbestos and asbestos containing materials ban. The set of principles to be applied provide the basis to craft the necessary legislation and/or regulations to ban the manufacture, use, reuse, import, transport, storage, or sale of all forms of asbestos and asbestos containing materials within the PacWastePlus participating countries.

11. PacWastePlus has also developed a Guidance for an Asbestos Code of Practice to be used in PacWastePlus participating countries to support the creation of their own codes on how to identify, manage and if needed, safely remove asbestos and asbestos-containing materials. A code is to advise regulatory bodies, practitioners, trades people and the public on how to undertake safe work requirements when working or encountering asbestos. It is a practical document that clearly provides information on aspects of working with asbestos, the risk associated and how to manage them.

Mercury management

12. The Secretariat is also implementing the Minamata Initial Assessment (MIA) Project with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to assist Pacific island countries ratify the Minamata Convention and take steps to protect their environment and communities from the adverse impacts of mercury pollution.
13. The GEF MIA project which is currently being implemented in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu join similar projects in Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Samoa which are under bilateral arrangements with UNEP. These countries have undertaken an assessment of national capacities to deal with mercury and develop mercury inventories capturing sources of mercury emissions and industries that produce or import mercury containing products.
14. The Secretariat has recently secured the ISLANDS Pacific Child Project from the GEF to assist Pacific island countries implement measures identified in their MIAs to manage mercury with the objective of creating a *Mercury Free Pacific Campaign* through a regional action plan.
15. The Mercury Free Pacific Campaign to address the high levels of environmental and human health threats posed by mercury in the Pacific will have the following objectives:
 - f. To raise awareness about mercury exposure and safer alternatives;
 - g. To assist Members promote mercury free policies and legislations;
 - h. To encourage Members to become Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury; and
 - i. To collect and dispose legacy mercury waste in the region.

Healthcare waste management

16. The Secretariat implemented the European Union funded PacWaste project from 2014-2018. This project worked with Pacific island countries to improve the management of healthcare waste and as part of its activities, it invested in 26 high-temperature healthcare waste incinerators.

17. Since the completion of this project, many of these incinerators are no longer operating effectively, and most require some level of maintenance or repair. The current risks posed by the COVID-19 global pandemic, reaffirms the importance of having these incinerators (or other approved methods of managing healthcare waste). Additionally, the Secretariat is aware of at least 23 new incinerators coming online in 4 countries, which have been funded by development partners.
18. The Secretariat is negotiating with development partners to create and fund the operation of a “Healthcare Medical Waste Investment Plan” to manage the necessary maintenance and repairs of incinerators currently commissioned in the Pacific island countries to ensure that they operate at required efficiency and sustainability levels to meet the required health and waste management outcomes.
19. The Secretariat is currently working closely with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Bank, World Health Organisation (WHO), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF), to design a Healthcare Medical Waste Investment Plan, which is attached (refer WP8.3.2/Att.2) for consideration for funding by development partners and countries.

Recommendation

20. The Meeting is invited to:

- 1) **endorse** the “Asbestos Management Legislative Reform Pathway” that is derived from the Asbestos Management Code of Practice and Policy Note to ban the importation of asbestos containing materials and **support** progress towards its adoption by Members;
- 2) **note** the status of addressing mercury waste in the Pacific and **support** the development of a “Mercury Free Pacific Campaign” to phase out mercury containing products; and
- 3) **support** the development of a “Healthcare Medical Waste Investment Plan”.

23 June 2021