



ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

BRS Treaties • Rotterdam Convention

Background

The dramatic growth in chemicals production and trade has raised public and official concern about the potential risks posed by hazardous chemicals and pesticides. Countries lacking adequate infrastructure to monitor the import and use of these chemicals are particularly vulnerable.

In response to these concerns, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) developed and promoted voluntary information-exchange programmes in the mid-1980s. FAO launched its International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides in 1985 and UNEP set up the London Guidelines for the Exchange of Information on Chemicals in International Trade in 1987.

The two organizations then introduced the 1989 Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure. Jointly implemented by FAO and UNEP, it helped to ensure that governments had the information needed about hazardous chemicals for assessing risks and taking informed decisions on chemical imports.

Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 Rio Summit, called for the adoption of a legally binding instrument on the PIC procedure by the year 2000. Consequently, the FAO UNEP launched negotiations which led to the finalization of the text of the Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals in International Trade. The Rotterdam Convention was adopted at a Conference of Plenipotentiaries on 10 September 1998 and entered into force on 24 February 2004.

The Convention covers the import and export of pesticides and industrial chemicals, listed in Annex III, that have been banned or severely restricted for health or environmental reasons by Parties and which have been notified by Parties for inclusion in an obligatory prior-informed consent (PIC) procedure.

Since the adoption of the Convention, the Conference of the Parties (COP) has adopted a series of decisions to amend Annex III to the Convention to list additional chemicals and make them subject to the Prior Informed Consent Procedure. The Convention process also facilitates information exchange amongst Parties on a wide range of potentially hazardous chemicals, and Parties to the Convention are required to notify the secretariat when domestic regulatory measures are taken to restrict potentially hazardous chemicals.

While the FAO and UNEP jointly perform secretariat functions for the Convention, they collaborate with the secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions to provide joint services where relevant.

Principles in the Rio Declaration covered by the Rotterdam Convention include:

- Recalling the pertinent provisions of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and chapter 19 of Agenda 21 on “Environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals, including prevention of illegal international traffic in toxic and dangerous products” (Rio Declaration and Agenda 21)
- Taking into account the circumstances and particular requirements of developing countries and countries with economies in transition, in particular the need to strengthen national capabilities and capacities for the management of chemicals, including transfer of technology, providing financial and technical assistance and promoting cooperation among the Parties (Principle 6)
- Desiring to ensure that hazardous chemicals that are exported from their territory are packaged and labelled in a manner that is adequately protective of human health and the environment, consistent with the principles of the Amended London Guidelines and the International Code of Conduct (Principle 1)
- Recognizing that trade and environmental policies should be mutually supportive with a view to achieving sustainable development (Principle 8)
- Determined to protect human health, including the health of consumers and workers, and the environment against potentially harmful impacts from certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade (Principle 1)

This factsheet on **The Chemicals Treaties (BRS Treaties): Rotterdam Convention** is included in the comprehensive report: *Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)*, pp. 26–29.