

WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network Newsletter

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WHO Workshop on Identifying Emerging Risks from Chemicals

A two day workshop was convened 20-21 February 2019 to bring together institutions from developing and industrialized countries with expertise in and expert knowledge of methodologies and systems for the identification of emerging risks to human health from chemicals. The workshop was hosted by RIVM at Bilthoven in the Netherlands, a Network Participant and WHO Collaborating Centre, and was attended by 48 participants from 32 countries. Two-thirds of the participants were from the WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network and the remainder were from other institutions and systems with expertise relating to the identification of emerging risks from chemicals. Development of the workshop was assisted by an organizing committee of Network participants.

The workshop discussed a report of existing methodologies and systems, based on a literature review and the results of a stakeholder survey completed by 30 institutions from the WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network or institutions involved with relevant networks or systems. The report was compiled by staff at Public Health England. The workshop was also informed by presentations about examples of existing systems, and by posters describing the work of each institution.

An operational definition of emerging risks from chemicals to inform future Network activities was discussed. Workshop participants also discussed how the Network could play a role in the identification of emerging risks in breakout group sessions. From these, possible follow up activities for the Network were identified, including sharing further information with the wider Network and training. These activities will be taken forward by a working group.

The report of this workshop will be shared with Network Participants when completed, and it is intended to publish some of the materials arising from this workshop.

The WHO Secretariat is grateful to RIVM for hosting the event, to the Ministry of Health of Germany for supporting the travel of a number of the participants, to NIEHS for making logistical support available through a contractor and to the organizing committee for their work in putting together this successful workshop.

New Network Participants

- Directorate of Government Analytical Laboratory, Uganda
- Center for Health and Environmental Risk Research, National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan



World Health Organization

Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health

WHO Launches Global Forum for Policy Makers

The WHO Global Chemicals and Health Network has been launched to provide a global forum for discussion among senior level Ministry of Health policy makers and representatives about issues related to health and chemicals. The goal of this network is to facilitate implementation of the WHO Chemicals Road Map which was approved by the World Health Assembly in May 2017. The network promotes collaboration on common policy challenges, perspectives and priorities of health ministries in managing chemicals, and facilitates continuity of contact among health ministries and with the WHO Secretariat. This network complements existing technical forums, such as the WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network.

The WHO Global Chemicals and Health Network held its inaugural meeting in November 2018. It is expected that relevant outputs from the WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network will be promoted to this policy-orientated forum to provide risk management options for countries.

<https://www.who.int/ipcs/saicm/roadmap/en/>

New Publications

Review of Mercury Biomarkers in Human Populations

A review was commissioned by WHO to provide a global status report on human exposure to mercury, derived from biomonitoring studies on blood, urine, hair and cord blood. The review summarises measurements taken from more than 300,000 individuals from 75 countries, taken within national biomonitoring programmes, birth cohort studies and cross-sectional studies in exposed populations. Studies have shown that in general populations, mercury concentrations had declined over time. Highly exposed populations were those in Arctic, tropical riverine and coastal and/or small island communities with high dietary consumption of fish, other seafood and marine mammals, and in individuals who work in or reside near artisanal or small-scale gold mining. Important data gaps were noted, in particular from populations living in small-island developing states, and in Asia and Africa. The data extracted from the studies have been compiled into a database, which it is hoped can be further developed as a resource to support evaluation of the control measures stipulated by the Minamata Convention. <https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP3904>

Public Health Impact of Chemicals

WHO has published a data addendum providing updated estimates of the burden of disease attributable to exposures to selected chemicals. This addendum estimates that 1.6 million lives and 45 million disability-adjusted life-years were lost in 2016 due to exposures to selected chemicals. This is higher than the estimates reported in the previous publication “The Public Health Impact of Chemicals: Knowns and Unknowns” which was based on 2012 data. Data are still only available for a small number of the chemicals which people are exposed to every day. The data which are available continue to show that addressing lead exposure would prevent significant deaths and disabilities.

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/279001/WHO-CED-PHE-EPE-18.09-eng.pdf>

Latest IARC Monographs

The IARC Monographs identify environmental factors that can increase the risk of cancer. The summary of the evaluation by the IARC Monograph Programme of the carcinogenicity of some nitrobenzenes and other industrial chemicals is available, and will be published as IARC Monograph Volume 123. All of the chemicals evaluated were classified as “possibly carcinogenic to humans” (Group 2B). A revised version of the IARC Monographs Preamble, which is a statement of the general principles and procedures used in developing Monograph evaluations, has also been published. This update of the 2006 version of the Preamble was prepared following an Advisory Group meeting of international experts which was convened by IARC in November 2018. All publications from the IARC Monograph Programme can be accessed at <http://monographs.iarc.fr>.

Network Online Workspace

A new online workspace for the dedicated use of Network Participants is now available. This password-protected SharePoint site is intended to provide a working area to access information about Network Participants and activities more freely than the public WHO web site. The site is currently under construction, but already contains the documents and presentations from the recent workshop on identifying emerging risks from chemicals which was held in February 2019. Network focal points will be sent details about how to obtain an account and password to access the site. The site eventually will be populated with information about all ongoing Network activities, contact details for participants and workspaces for sub-groups to share documents in progress. Network focal points are encouraged to sign up for an account.