Effects of Industrial Accidents

The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-1) to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, met in Brussels from 22–24 November 2000.

The Convention, which came into force on 19 April 2000, lays down a number of provisions aimed at protecting human beings and the environment against industrial accidents capable of causing transboundary effects and at promoting active international cooperation between the Contracting Parties before, during and after such accidents.

Delegates agreed on a system of mutual notification of accidents that could have a transboundary impact, the Draft UN/ECE Industrial Accident Notification System. This is for use between Parties or other UN/ECE member countries, at national level, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention for the transmission of early warnings, information and assistance requests. The notification system is based on three different report forms:

1. UN/ECE Early Warning Report – gives information or warning in the event of an industrial accident or the imminent threat thereof;
2. UN/ECE Information Report – gives detailed supplementary information on an accident once the situation has been assessed;
3. UN/ECE Assistance Request Report – deals with matters related to the provision of assistance in order to mitigate consequences including transboundary effects.

Delegates agreed to work closely together to identify high-risk plants in a bid to prevent major industrial accidents or at least be better prepared to deal with them should they arise.

The Conference also discussed the prevention of accidental water pollution and the Convention’s Internet home page. Delegates agreed that joint work should continue on the prevention of accidental water pollution; determining responsibilities and liabilities; the long-term work programme and the work plan for 2001–2002; and human and financial resources. (MJ)

Cartagena Protocol

First Intergovernmental Committee
by Françoise Burhenne-Guilmin* and Yaw Osafo**

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP) was held from 11-15 December 2000 in Montpellier, France. Eighty-three countries and one hundred and thirty intergovernmental, non-governmental and industry organizations took part in what was the first meeting of the ICCP, following the adoption of the Protocol in Montreal Canada, in January 2000 (see Environmental Policy and Law, Vol. 30 No. 1-2 at page 46).

The meeting started with an opening address from the chair, Philémon Yang (Cameroon), who thanked the French government for hosting the meeting and recognized the contributions of Veit Koester (Denmark) and Juan Máyr (Colombia) to the adoption of the Protocol. He then called for the process of implementation to be based on mutual trust before officially opening the meeting.

Montpellier Mayor Georges Freche welcomed the delegates and expressed hope that the Montpellier Statement would make a telling contribution to the process of implementation of the Protocol.

The French Minister of Environment, Dominique Voynet, drew attention to the importance of the Protocol as a means of developing common rules on trade in Living Modified Organisms (LMOs). She also emphasized the significance of the identification and labelling of LMOs for the EU and stressed that France will not accept LMOs until a system of traceability is established.

The UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer welcomed the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council’s approval of US $26 million to assist in the establishment of biosafety regulatory systems in more than 100 countries. He called for greater accountability and involvement on the part of the private sector and urged countries to facilitate public participation.