
FAO

Africa: Stockpiles of Obsolete Pesticides

At an Expert Meeting in Rome on 18 September 2002, Alemayehu Wodageneh, an expert on pesticides with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) told participants that the amount of toxic waste stemming from obsolete pesticides in Africa is higher than previously estimated.

He warned that every African country has stockpiles of obsolete pesticides and associated waste such as heavily contaminated soils and millions of containers. FAO estimates that the toxic waste in Africa alone amounts to approximately 120,000 tonnes, with more than 500,000 tonnes worldwide. The FAO had previously estimated the amount of obsolete pesticides in Africa at around 50,000

tonnes. An estimated 30 per cent of the waste is believed to be persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

The condition of the obsolete pesticide stocks varies from well-stored products to products that have entirely leaked from corroded steel drums and other containers into the soil. But even where storage conditions are good, the length of storage and the nature of the products have resulted in corrosion and product leakage.

The FAO have successfully concluded the disposal of nearly 3,000 tonnes in more than ten countries in Africa and the Near East in close collaboration with bilateral partners. But in the last ten years, less than 5 per cent of the estimated stockpiles have been disposed of. The FAO's

biggest clean-up project, in Ethiopia, currently aims at the removal of over 3,000 tonnes.

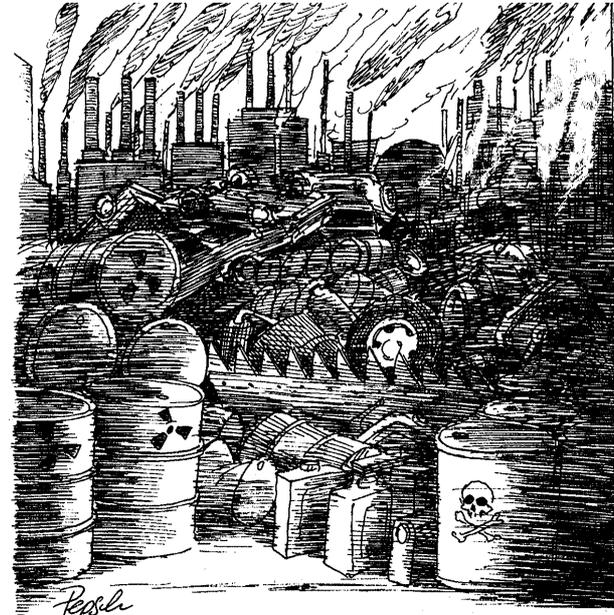
Since no adequate hazardous waste destruction facilities exist in Africa, waste has so far been shipped to a developed country for high-temperature incineration at an average cost of US\$3,500 per tonne of waste.

However, despite the committed efforts of FAO and others to deal with the problem, obsolete pesticides continue to accumulate. Over the past few years, the FAO has trained thousands of plant protection experts in pesticide control and management. Nevertheless, in many developing countries, management of pesticides is often still inadequate due to a lack of resources. Many of these countries suffer from weak import controls, poor storage and stock management, and a lack of training in appropriate use.

A group of international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) recently launched the *Africa Stockpile Programme* (ASP), which aims to clear all obsolete pesticides and contaminated waste in Africa in the next 10-15 years and to promote prevention measures and capacity building.

The total funds needed to cover the ASP costs are expected to be US\$200-250 million. Current partners of this initiative include financial institutions and specialised agencies (among others, the African Development Bank, the chemical industry, FAO, the Global Environment Fa-

cility, Pesticide Action Network, the UN Environment Programme, the UN Industrial Development Organisation, the World Bank and the World Wide Fund for Nature/WWF). (MJ)



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Courtesy: SZ