

REFERENCES TO OTHER TOPICS

World Water Day

Each year, 22 March is World Water Day. The theme for 2001 is 'Water and Health' and an innovation this year is that the lead agency within the UN system is the World Health Organisation (WHO).

In close collaboration with the International Water and Sanitation Centre, the WHO suggests that governments, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and professional organisations work together to promote mass media education programmes, focusing on children and young people; promoting community and self-help programmes, increasing public and private sector support through collaboration and participation in the celebrations on World Water Day. (See www.worldwaterday.org)

FAO: Poor Quality Pesticides

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have issued a joint statement warning that around 30 per cent of all pesticides marketed in developing countries with an estimated annual market value of US\$900 million do not meet internationally-accepted quality standards, and thus pose a serious threat to human health and the environment.

It is claimed that these poor-quality pesticides frequently contain hazardous substances and impurities that have already been banned or severely restricted elsewhere and such pesticides often contribute to the accumulation of obsolete pesticide stocks in developing countries.

In developing countries, pesticides are mainly used for farming, but can also be used for public health, such as insecticides for controlling insects spreading malaria. Possible causes of low quality of pesticides can include both poor production and formulation and the inadequate selection of chemicals.

When the quality of labelling and packaging is also taken into account, the proportion of poor-quality pesticide products in developing countries is even higher.

The two UN agencies urge governments, international and regional organisations to adopt the worldwide accepted FAO/WHO pesticide specifications to ensure the production and trade of good-quality products. Countries should make these voluntary standards legally binding.

The FAO and WHO have signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to co-operate in a joint programme to develop specifications for pesticides. This unified procedure would enhance the development of high quality standards for pesticides, leading to improved human and environmental safety as well as to more sustainable agricultural production.

USA:

– New EPA Administrator

The Senate has confirmed former New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman (Republican) as the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Replying to a written question, Christine Whitman said that President Bush had told her that she would have Cabinet-level status. However, she said she did not have "any particular views on legislation making EPA a department". Senator Barbara Boxer (Democrat) has introduced legislation to elevate the agency to Cabinet status and rename it the Department of Environmental Protection Affairs.

The new Administrator told a Senate panel that she would review recent rules released by the Clinton administration, including those to curb sulphur in diesel fuel and to address impaired waters. She said that she would also review a ruling under the Toxic Substances Control Act that would ban the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether in fuels.

– Trading Standards

The US Trade Representative said recently that he agrees that the United States' trading partners should be required to uphold environmental and labour standards and that he is examining how best to accomplish that goal. He said that the new administration "believe it is very important to try and improve environment and working conditions...but want to be sure that we do not do so in a protectionist fashion."

UN Forum on Forests

The newly established Forum has decided to locate its Secretariat in New York.

Cost of Climate Change

Global warming will cost the world several billion dollars a year unless urgent efforts are made to curb emissions of carbon dioxide and the other gases linked with the 'greenhouse effect'.

A report by insurers, members of the United Nations Environment Programme Financial Services Initiative, indicates that losses due to more frequent tropical cyclones, loss of land as a result of rising sea levels and damage to fishing stocks, agriculture and water supplies, could annually cost around US\$304.2 billion.

In some low-lying States such as the Maldives, the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, the losses linked with climate change could, by 2050, exceed 10 per cent of their national wealth or gross domestic product.

The estimates, published in UNEP's *Our Planet* magazine, come in an article from Munich Re, one of the world's biggest reinsurance companies, which has been monitoring the cost of natural disasters since the 1960s. Gerhard Berz, head of Munich Re's Geoscience Research Group, says, "there is reason to fear that climatic change will lead to natural catastrophes of hitherto unknown force and frequency. Studies have indicated, disturbingly, that climatic changes could trigger worldwide losses totaling many hundreds of billions of dollars per year."

Global Biodiversity Information Facility

The GBIF was set up by the organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on 20 December 2000. This facility is an international project to provide access to vast quantities of data on the planet's flora and fauna. The European Commission has joined the Facility as an associate member and, in order to play a co-ordination role in GBIF, the Commission will co-fund the establishment of a European network of biodiversity information (ENBI). Three member States (Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands) have applied, along with Australia, to host the GBIF Secretariat on their territory.

Greece: Fines brought to an end

The case of the polluting waste dump at Kouroupitos in Crete can be regarded as closed. Greece was condemned on 4 July 2000 to pay a fine of Euro 20,000 a day because the dump near Hania did not meet standards laid down by EU legislation. On March 8 Greece informed the Commission that the dump had been closed down on February 26. The Commission has checked this information and has now been able to confirm the closure of the dump. This means that Greece has to pay Euro 4,780,000 in total, of which Euro 3,600,000 has already been paid. The Commission expects to receive the outstanding sums for January and February in April and May respectively.

Greece also announced that the first stage of the clean-up of the site had now begun. A new provisional installation for the temporary storage of waste had been opened and preparations for a permanent waste management scheme put in hand. Construction of both a composting plant and a landfill site should begin in late summer (see last issue at p. 61).

ITLOS: Swordfish Dispute

By Order of 15 March 2001, at the request of the parties (Chile and EU), the President of the Special Chamber of the Tribunal formed to deal with the case on conservation of swordfish stocks in the south-eastern Pacific ocean extended the time-limit for making preliminary objections.

Under the Order of 15 March 2001 of the President of the Special Chamber, the time-limit of 90 days for the making of preliminary objections would commence from 1 January 2004 and each party would have the right to request that the said time-limit should begin to apply from any date prior to 1 January 2004 (see last issue at p. 62).

The text of the Orders of 20 December 2000 and 15 March 2001 can be consulted on the United Nations website at www.un.org/Depts/los/.

