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# ChemicalWatch

**GLOBAL RISK & REGULATION NEWS**

## UN experts draw closer on second Global Chemicals Outlook

Workshop hears of central role of chemicals in sustainable development goals

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The UN's sound management of chemicals and hazardous waste process is set to consider the results of the Global Chemicals Outlook as an essential part of the future science/policy interface, a workshop of experts from around the world has heard.

Speaking at the event in Bonn, Gertrud Sahler, president of the International Conference on Chemicals Management 5

([ICCM5<sup>1</sup>](#)), said the implementation of the UN Environment Programme's (Unep) Global Chemical Outlook II process is crucial to any future chemicals framework.

"The process offers us the unique opportunity to think about its use as a model for a long-term science/policy interface," she said.

### Opportunity

The workshop, called to gather input into the imminent [GCO II report<sup>2</sup>](#), brought together more than 100 experts from five regions around the world, including from government, research institutions, the chemical and downstream industry and civil society. And, according to Achim Halpaap, principal officer and senior advisor of Unep's chemicals and health branch, it comes as the issue reaches a "critical window of opportunity".

It is, he said, a "crucial milestone" along the road to developing the final report – due by the end of the year – and the first time the GCO II has called on other experts to get involved, that is, beyond its authors and steering committee.

GCO II, Mr Halpaap said, seeks to address both legacy challenges as well as opportunities, and will be feeding into the March 2019 session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (Unep4) in Nairobi. This has a theme of innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production (SCP).

'Creating a community is very important, because in the end if we publish a 200-page document and nobody reads it and nobody champions it, that's not helping anyone,' Achim Halpaap, Unep



"We want to see if the initial work we have done with all the report's lead authors is going in the right direction. We want to know if there is any knowledge missing," Mr Halpaap said.

And, he added, it was equally about gaining support for the work: "Engaging experts in the process is as important as having a document in place. Creating a community is very important, because in the end if we publish a 200-page document and nobody reads it and nobody champions it, that's not helping anyone."

## Magnitude

During the workshop's opening session, Anne-Sofie Andersson, executive director of NGO ChemSec, said the problems caused by hazardous chemicals are of the same magnitude as climate change in terms of threat to humans and the environment. But, she added, "it hasn't got that attention yet, and it is for all of us here to get it that attention among decision makers and the media."

"We have to solve this together," she said. "So let's do something great!"

And Rafael Cayuela, corporate chief economist at Dow Chemical, told the meeting he believes the chemical industry is on the brink of a fourth industrial revolution more far reaching than that described last year by the World Economic Forum. It will have three legs, he said: revolutions of sustainability, digitalisation and societal.

"The industry has been very, very busy coping with a significant amount of growth all over the world and significant amount of complexity ... We find a situation in which we are doing our day to day work, but the reality is that something really big is happening."

## The GCO process

The GCO II report is the second of its kind, building on the original released five years ago. Two mandates – from Unep's governing council in 2013 and the 2016 UN Environmental Assembly – have requested that among other things, the process addresses:

progress towards the 2020 goal on the sound management of chemicals;  
linkages between chemicals and waste;  
environmental policy issues, identified by the International Conference on Chemicals Management;  
issues where there is emerging evidence of a risk to human health and the environment; and  
options for implementing actions to reach relevant sustainable development goals and targets up to, and beyond, 2020.

A 'zero' version of the report will go into review in September, with the final version due to be presented at next February's meeting of the Open Ended Working Group (**OEWG<sup>3</sup>**), a month before it will be taken up at Unea4. From there, it will inform the International Conference on Chemicals Management in 2020.

"There's a lot of momentum now," said Mr Halpaap. "But ultimately our evaluation benchmark – the measure of our success – is that the knowledge generated and the conclusions reached in one way or another affect global policy."

The workshop continues until 20 June.



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