

World Conference on Disaster Reduction

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Indian Ocean Disaster: Environmentally Sound Management of Hazardous Wastes and Other Wastes for Risk Reduction

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- On behalf of the Basel Convention, allow me to express our deepest sympathy for the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. One of the many serious problems resulting from tsunami disasters is the massive quantity of wastes, released into the seas and onto the land. Such wastes could contain used oil, used batteries, obsolete electrical and electronic equipment, batteries, toxic chemicals, asbestos, PCBs, pesticides, infectious wastes, heavy metals and many other hazardous wastes.
- If not properly managed, these wastes could result in serious - sometimes irreversible and long-lasting - health damage, contamination of precious ground and surface waters, destruction of fragile ecosystems such as mangrove forests, and depletion of fishery stocks. .
- The Basel Convention is currently consulting the Parties in the affected areas in Asia to ascertain their immediate and mid- to long-term needs to protect human health and the environment from adverse effects of wastes and to coordinate efforts with those of the United Nations and other organizations.
- Preliminary reports from some of the most seriously affected countries in Asia indicate that collection and disposal of a significant amount of debris and waste material created by the impact of the tsunami waves and associated flooding is generally not taking place in an environmentally friendly manner and will, most probably, result in future environmental problems. The sheer amount of wastes and debris covering the vast areas of the afflicted region may simply overwhelm the

- Today, developing countries are faced with enormous difficulties in handling all kinds of wastes, including hazardous waste, in a proper manner. The ever-growing quantity of wastes caused by rapid urbanization and population growth, changing consumption patterns, and high costs of transport and disposal operations for hazardous waste, are among many reasons for this situation. Vulnerability of these countries, particularly small island developing States, to natural and man-made disasters is an aggravating factor. Indeed unsound management of wastes – both hazardous and solid wastes – is a factor compounding disaster risks to human health and the environment. It is vitally important, therefore, for those countries to incorporate community based emergency waste management, including preventive measures, into local and national development policies. The practical experience of the first decade of implementation of the Basel Convention in developing countries tends to highlight the need for the
- In close collaboration with concerned United Nations specialized agencies and bodies, in particular WHO, UNEP, FAO and OCHA, the Basel Convention has drawn up a guidance document for hazardous waste management in tsunami struck areas in the emergency phase. The objective of the document is to determine rapidly what hazardous waste has entered the environment and where it is. It is intended to provide guidance to governments on a set of first measures to take in tsunami struck areas in regard to the urgent need to protect human health and the environment from hazardous and other wastes as a complement to or in support of relevant initiatives.
- Based on these preliminary guidance elements, mid-to long-term measures should be developed and implemented as part of the overall re-design and re-construction of the waste management infrastructure in the severely affected areas. The secretariat of the Basel Convention, together with its regional center in Indonesia, and in cooperation with other concerned organizations, will provide assistance to disaster stricken countries in the transition phase towards environmentally sound management of hazardous and other wastes and to reduce future risks, taking into account the specific needs of individual countries.
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development of policies addressing the management of hazardous waste and municipal waste in an integrated manner in order to improve, among others, disaster preparedness. The Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention at its seventh meeting last October recognized that the development of integrated policies and plans for waste management, in which local governments and communities are proactively engaged, will enable the key generators of municipal wastes - namely towns and villages - and generators of hazardous wastes such as industry, hospitals, research institutes and workshops, to work together to develop and implement comprehensive and effective waste management.

- The Conference also endorsed the view that there are important benefits in pursuing a regional approach for managing waste, in particular hazardous waste, as developing countries may fail individually to reach the critical mass for accessing the adequate waste management infrastructure.
- The Basel Convention, in the last decade, contributed concretely and effectively to protecting developing countries from the abusive import of hazardous waste. In the second decade of its operation, the Convention is refocusing its effort on the strengthening of the capacity of developing countries towards environmentally sound management of hazardous and other wastes, including in disaster situations.
- In light of the serious health and environmental impacts of wastes which may be created as a result of natural or man-made disasters and the critical needs of developing countries to be able to handle their nationally generated hazardous waste in emergency situations and build effective preventive measures, this important Conference may wish to consider measures to facilitate the development of national integrated waste management action plans in specific disaster-prone countries in a regionally coordinated manner..
- Let me conclude by thanking the government of Japan for the excellent organization of the Conference and its generous and warm hospitality expended to all of us participating in the meeting.

