

## Defining hazardous wastes

Under the Basel Convention, wastes are substances or objects which are disposed of, or are intended to be disposed of, or are required to be disposed of by the provisions of national law. Annexes I, VIII and IX of the Convention list those wastes that are classified as hazardous and subject to the control procedures under the Convention. Annex II of the Convention identifies those wastes that require special consideration (known as "other wastes", and which primarily refer to household wastes). Parties may also inform the Convention Secretariat of additional wastes, other than the wastes listed in Annexes I and II of the Convention, that are considered or defined as hazardous wastes under their national legislation.

The Convention defines as waste 'disposal' anything from complete destruction to resource recovery, recycling, reclamation, direct re-use or alternative uses.

Wastes covered by the Convention include:

- biomedical and healthcare wastes
- used oils
- used lead acid batteries
- persistent organic pollutants (POPs), chemicals and pesticides that persist for many years in the environment
- polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), used in industry as heat exchange fluids, in electric transformers and capacitors, and as additives in paint, carbonless copy paper, sealants and plastics
- thousands of chemical wastes generated by industries and others
- electronic and electrical wastes ("e-waste") such as mobile phones and computers
- wastes from the dismantling of ships
- materials containing mercury and asbestos



Pile of used lead-acid batteries.



Abandoned ship.

## Our partners

The Basel Convention works closely with several partners, including:



Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade



Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)



UNEP Chemicals



Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)



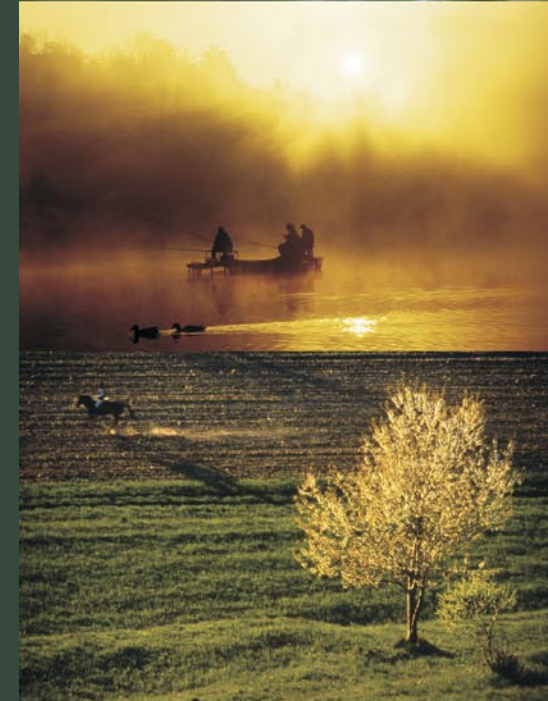
The Regional and Coordinating Centres of the Basel Convention are located in Argentina, China, Egypt, El Salvador, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Senegal, Slovak Republic, South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (Samoa), South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

## Where to find us

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## AT A GLANCE



# Basel Convention

The Basel Convention was created to protect people and the environment from the negative effects of the inappropriate management of hazardous wastes worldwide. It is considered the most comprehensive global treaty dealing with hazardous waste materials throughout their lifecycles, from production and transport to final use and disposal.

## Why the Basel Convention is important

In the 1980s, people began getting sick, and even dying, from poisons in their environment. The problem was particularly severe in certain developing countries. The cause was traced to the random dumping of hazardous wastes. To avoid tightening environmental regulations in industrialized countries, companies used “toxic ships” to transport their hazardous wastes to Africa, Eastern Europe and other regions. Once on shore, the shipments were dumped indiscriminately, spilled accidentally or managed improperly, resulting in contaminated land, water and air.

A few severe cases highlighted a far more general problem: people everywhere are at risk from the careless, unregulated production and transport of dangerous chemicals. Accidents, spills and unregulated dumping can happen anywhere, releasing unknown quantities into the environment. The events sometimes go undetected, until the poisons reach our own bodies.



Barrels of hazardous waste.

The Basel Convention is intended to safeguard people everywhere – and generations to come – from these practices.



Testing for PCBs.

## How it works

Negotiated in the 1980s under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, the Basel Convention ensures that strong controls are applied from the moment of generation of a hazardous waste to its storage, transport, treatment, reuse, recycling, recovery and final disposal.

In the beginning, the Convention was particularly concerned with transport, regulating the transboundary movements of hazardous and other wastes by applying the “Prior Informed Consent” procedure. According to this procedure, only shipments between consenting Parties are legal and all shipments made without such consent are illegal. Moreover, shipments to and from non-Parties are illegal unless there is a special agreement.

Illegal traffic is a criminal offence, and each Party to the Convention is required to introduce appropriate national or domestic legislation to prevent and punish illegal traffic in hazardous and other wastes.

The Convention also requires its Parties to ensure that hazardous and other wastes are managed and disposed of in an environmentally sound manner (ESM). To this end, Parties are expected to do the following:

- minimize the quantities that are moved across borders,
- treat and dispose of wastes as close as possible to their place of generation, and
- prevent or minimize the generation of wastes at source.

### Environmental benefits

Protecting human health and the environment are the aims of the Basel Convention. It first focused on control and subsequently on the concept of Environmentally Sound Management of hazardous and other wastes. It thus helped introduce an era of environmental sustainability.



## Who does what?

The **Conference of the Parties** (known as the COP), of which all the States that are party to the Convention are members, is the primary organ of the Convention. The COP develops the policies that will guide the implementation of the Convention, and it can adopt amendments to the Convention, as well as new instruments, such as Protocols, if it considers that these would assist in the achievement of the goals of the Convention. The COP normally meets once every two years, and seeks to reach its decisions by consensus.

The Basel Convention **Secretariat** helps to implement the Convention by providing support to Parties in accordance with the Convention text and instructions from the COP. Administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and based in Geneva. The Secretariat reports directly to the COP.

The Basel Convention also has 14 **Regional and Coordinating Centres** to develop and undertake regional projects, and deliver training and technology transfer for the implementation of the Convention.



Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Basel Convention, Nairobi, 2006.



Basel Convention Centre for the Asia-Pacific Region (China).



Regional Workshop on the Assessment of the Environmentally Sound Management of Used Oils in the Caribbean-Baseel Convention Centre for the Caribbean Region (Trinidad and Tobago).