Experience in Chemical and Waste Management Through the Developing of the Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in Thailand

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Background and Obstacles

According to the chapter 19 of Agenda 21, the Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers: PRTR program has been recognized as one of essential tools to promote environmentally sound management of chemical. In 1999, Pollution Control Department initiated to integrate the PRTR into the Thailand's environmental management program. Late 2000, the Pollution Control Department prepared and distributed the survey form to about 360 factories focusing on chemical industry, petrochemical industry and plastic industry located in two industrial estates in two provinces, in order to test and make revisions to the reporting format, study the type and quantity of the chemical substances usage for drafting the criteria of selection type of chemical and threshold subjecting to report, size of establishment, and etc. However, there were only 15 percent or 54 factories responded to the surveys and there were only 10 percent or 37 factories provided information to all parts of the surveys. The 5 percent remaining or 17 factories provided only general data such as name, address. These considerable low responses of the target factories may be that PCD lack authority to enforce the industries- besides, the factories also might not quite understand the purposes of the project, might worry about their trade secret and efficiency of pollution control equipments.

In 2001, the Pollution Control Department cooperated with the United State of Environmental Protection Agency: U.S.EPA, under the cooperation project between the Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment and U.S.EPA, conducted the two days workshops in each two target industrial estates. The goal of this workshop would be to develop in-country knowledge about estimating release and transfer of chemicals. Total of 80 participants who were representative of involving relevant government and target industries participated in the workshop. Unfortunately, the program could not be run consecutively, during 2002-2005 the program had been paused because the Pollution Control Department had limited budget and also had limited staffs to work. These issues must be taken into account for the future work that it should not hindered especially by a lack of staff.

Current and Future Challenges

The PRTR program has been carried on again in 2006. Currently PCD are preparing and developing basic schemes for PRTR such as activities as

1. Set up the PRTR Technical Working Group under the Pollution Control Committee.
2. Collect and review the list of regulated chemicals and industries under the PRTR System of other countries to set up and develop criteria for determining candidate chemical substances and industry categories subject to PRTR reporting.
3. Review and draft a list of chemical substances and certain industry categories subject to PRTR reporting.

4. Review and prepare draft guidance on estimating release of pollutants from industries to environmental compartment.
5. Collect and review the existing reporting formats for designing a reporting format for the PRTR in Thailand.
6. Collect and review the list of industries under the Department of Industrial Works and the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand for conducting a PRTR pilot reporting trial and a reviewing the list of chemical substances subject to reporting.

At present, the step of establishment of the PRTR Technical Working Group under the Pollution Control Committee (PCC) also has been delayed because of the expiration term of the qualified persons appointed by National Environmental Board (NEB) as members of the PCC. According to the process of appointment of qualified member for the PCC cannot be made until Thailand has a new cabinet, the progress of the program certainly has been faced with the problem again.

However, there are many tasks awaiting to be conducted in the future steps such as preparing the system, conducting workshop, conducting a PRTR Pilot reporting trial, developing data analysis and data dissemination procedure and etc, include resolving obstacles arising from the developing the National PRTR. These obstacles may be difficult to resolve and may take very long time to achieve. The most significant issue which has been recognized is that the Pollution Control Department does not have mandate to enforce the over the factory, unlike Department of Industrial Works. Therefore, how Pollution Control Department could make the PRTR compulsory and how Pollution Control Department make the PRTR available to the public. In addition, chemical management activities in Thailand involve different government agencies having authority under the laws and regulations addressing diverse chemical groups. These agencies collect chemical data depending on their specific purposes such as production, transport, storage, distribution and disposal. In addition, the information is not generally available in a national uniform and consistent.

Though, the development of a National Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers system in Thailand will be a critical task to achieve the chemicals sound management. In addition, every step of the development will take time, resources, and face with various obstacles. Learning experiences from countries that have successfully adopted PRTR, cooperation of all stakeholders, and endeavoring of PCD to solve either any known problem or unexpected problems would make PCD success in establishing the National PRTR, eventually.

Note

1. A qualified member appointed by the cabinet shall hold office for a term of three years and may be re-appointed for a period of not more than one consecutive term.
2. The National Environment Board consist of the Prime Minister as the Chairman, a Deputy Prime Minister designated by the Prime Minister as the first Vice Chairman the Minister of Science, Technology and Environment as the second Vice Chairman, and committee from different ministry such as the Minister of Defense, Finance, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Transport and Communications, Interior, Education, Public Health, Industry, etc.