

## **Chemical management: Thailand experiences**

Duangtip Hongsamoot  
Food and Drug Administration  
Ministry of Public Health  
Thailand

### **Background information:**

Thailand situated in South-East Asia region with population of 69million. At present, the Thai government policies have been focused on authority decentralization to local authorities while empowering people at grass-root level as well as strengthening public-private partnerships.

Similar to other countries, chemicals are closely interwoven with the Thai society, the so-called “from cradle-to-grave”. Therefore, effective and efficient measures for sound chemical management are crucial for the country development. A number of legal instruments have been enacted to control chemicals and prevent their harmful effects. There are at least 13 major acts, one decree, and a number of ministerial notifications relating to chemical management. These regulations are governed by 10 ministries. However, this wide range of measures cannot be efficient and effective unless a coordinating mechanism works well.

The national Coordinating Committee on Chemical Safety was, thus, established and pursued its first national master plan in 1997. Currently, the Committee is developing its 3<sup>rd</sup> national master plan, which is expected to start in September 2007. The Committee now comprises 20 government organizations, 10 academic institutions, 10 non-profit civil societies and 10 industry representatives. Health Minister chairs the Committee; the Thai Food and Drug Administration acts as secretariat and financing the Committee activities.

### **Experiences to share**

Providing that Thailand has a long experience in the process development, there are issues that we can share from our context.

The former plans were set using function-based approach and thus exacerbate fragmentation that already exists in government sectors. The initiative to reduce fragmentation started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> master plan is to establish area-based plans, program targets and program indicators. Consequently, the current (draft) 3<sup>rd</sup> master plan has 137 projects under three main areas: improvement of chemical management, reduce risk in

agricultural sector and industrial sector, and community empowerment. To achieve the targets, related organizations need to work collaboratively. Although it took time to reach consensus for the targets and indicators, this is to create interaction among stakeholders.

Chemical management issues require responsiveness and dynamic in terms of content, administration and process. The 3<sup>rd</sup> master plan was framed in accordance with the current government national plan and the SAICM Global Plan of Action. New issues have been introduced to keep pace with current issues. Therefore, new stakeholders were recruited to match with the activities. For example, the current Thai government policy is giving priority in decentralizing its authorities, the 3<sup>rd</sup> master plan unavoidably establish strategies accordingly. This would help convincing national financing agencies to allocate substantial budget to carry the projects.

The national Committee component was also revised to better serve the new strategies in the master plan. Chemical management issue is probably crucial only in the arena of academics but not in policy-makers' clear interest. It has been difficult to win full financial support from the government despite well prepared plans. Consequently, the difficulty is to strike a well-balanced Committee and recruit competent and yet appropriate Committee members. The past experiences showed us that the Committee should not contain only technical people but also strong political involvement member.

Having a common theme to work across the board is key to build-up multi-sectoral participation. After pushing the national chemical database project a few years ago, it was now approved with the budget approximately US\$ 500,000. Participants in this project are those government agencies monitoring chemicals throughout their life cycle, which are more than 10 organisations. In the preparation phase, each needs to share their own database and adjust them to facilitate the establishment of the national database. This is a learning process for all. Along the way they could find loopholes and neglected issues that need to be remedied. Consequently, this activity could improve the control systems.

### **Rooms for improvement**

Although the national Committee has inter-ministerial composition by nature – the perfect model for chemical management issues – it is still fragmented. It has been observed that each organization has its own space and keeps distant from the others. Real dialogue in the group has been

seldom. Therefore strategies to facilitate effective inter-ministerial coordination needs to be seriously explored. This could help the Committee to function for a better bridging mechanism rather than only bringing stakeholders to one forum.

Bringing in non-profit civil society into the chemical safety arena is new and precarious to both the governmental organizations (NGO) and the society itself. In addition, the community empowering strategy in the 3<sup>rd</sup> national master plan is new as well. Fortunately, there has been full participation from a few advocate non-governmental organizations in putting the program content in the master plan. So far government sectors still take lead roles in agenda setting and meeting discussions. Consequently, there is a need to have more insight in building trust and designing practical partnership programs with civil society and NGO organisation. The partnership is the essence of sustainable success on chemical management in the grass-root level.