

# THE STOCKHOLM CONVENTION & STOCKPILES

**“There is virtually no developing country or economy in transition that does not have a stockpile of obsolete pesticides.”**

***United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)***

- The FAO has spent several years trying to find out how many stockpiles of outdated pesticides exist, and deal with those stockpiles. The organization estimates that there may be as much as half a million tonnes of old pesticides in these stockpiles.
- About 20,000 tonnes are believed to be stockpiled in Africa, with perhaps another 80,000 tonnes in Asia and Latin America, and at least 150,000 tonnes in countries of the former Soviet Union.
- Stocks of old pesticides can include a variety of poisonous substances, including arsenic and mercury. The FAO estimates chemicals to be eliminated under the Stockholm convention make up about 20% of stockpiles.
- Stockpiled pesticides that come under the Stockholm Convention (endrin, mirex, toxaphene, chlordane, heptachlor, aldrin, dieldrin) are associated with a variety of harmful effects on human health. Those effects include damage to the nervous system, the immune system, and damage to internal organs such as the kidneys and liver. They have also been linked to cancer, and health defects.
- Many of the stockpiles are small and scattered, making it difficult to contain and control them. In some cases, the chemicals are stored unsafely and are leaking into the environment. Most stockpiles are situated near water, as that is where most agriculture takes place. The FAO has documented cases where the water relied on for drinking by local people has become contaminated. In other places, the pesticides have contaminated soil in the area where they are stored.
- Ratifying the Stockholm Convention will help countries to deal with their stockpiles. The convention requires that countries make lists of what is in their stockpiles. Stockpiles containing Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the chemicals listed for elimination under the Convention, must be securely stored until they can be destroyed in an environmentally sound manner.
- A program recently started by some non-government and United Nations organizations, the “Africa Stockpiles Program”, will give African countries additional help to deal with their stockpiles. In October 2002, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) pledged US\$25 million to the program. A condition of funding will be ratification of the global Stockholm Convention.