

Invisible News

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BROUGHT to YOU by the GENEVA CHEMICALS & WASTE CLUSTER at the 4th UN Environment Assembly

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CHEMICALS & WASTE in the ENVIRONMENT?

Chemical & waste burden ends up in environment

We only have one planet, right? So ultimately, mother nature has to absorb our excesses, whether in the form of invisible chemicals or highly visible plastic waste. And according to latest thinking on planetary boundaries, the threshold has been reached. The effects of past and current decades of industrialization and over-consumption will be felt long into the future, just as the chemical burden we inherited has been passed already on to young and - in turn - future generations.

Evidence of chemical and plastic pollution is found even in the most remote regions such as the Arctic, or the deepest of deep ocean trenches.

Chemicals are indeed everywhere. Waste is indeed everywhere. Whilst the development of chemicals has led to many positive aspects of economic growth throughout the 20th century, it has also led to severe pollution problems with profound impacts upon human health, upon wildlife, and upon the environment.

And when mankind impacts upon the environment, we impact upon ourselves. Chemicals are now found in our food chain, in our blood, in our breastmilk. Some are carcinogenic. Some damage our neural or reproductive systems. Some lead to birth defects. We must protect ourselves, as well as the oceans, as well as the wildlife.

Scientists are predicting the complete collapse of wildlife populations as a result of pollution from chemicals and waste. Children are being born with an inherited toxic burden, passing this on to their children, and their children's children.

The time for sound management of chemicals and waste, is now.



Marine litter and pollution from plastic waste is one of the most urgent - and visible - global environmental challenges currently faced by society

Making the Invisible, Visible

The Geneva Chemicals & Waste Cluster is a group of international organisations in Geneva which collectively work to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste. This lounge area installation is brought to you by four organisations of this cluster, namely:

- Secretariat of the [Basel, Rotterdam, & Stockholm Conventions](#) (BRS);
- Secretariat of the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#);
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management ([SAICM](#)); and
- [UN Environment](#), Chemicals and Health Branch (UNEP)

See www.brsmeas.org www.mercuryconvention.org www.saicm.org and www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste for more info



Populations of killer whale (Orcinus orca sp.) are predicted to collapse due to contamination from just one toxic chemical group, polychlorinated biphenyls (or PCBs), listed under the Stockholm Convention

What is needed to tackle these challenges?

No single state, sector or industry has all the answers. We look to (and contribute to) the broader UN family and member states for full and effective implementation of the SDGs. We look to (and contribute to) UNEA4 for progress on overarching global governance on chemicals and waste, including the marine plastic litter problem. And we look to the private sector, to academia, and to civil society for the development and dissemination of innovative new approaches, new alternatives, new ways of doing business and of doing development.

The fullest possible implementation of the chemicals and waste conventions, and the achievement of the SAICM 2020 goal, is urgently needed. Mainstreaming of gender into planning and implementing approaches and actions to those ends, especially in the context of SDGs, is crucial.

The quest for sound management of chemicals and waste is of vital importance to us all. And its achievement requires the participation of all. Underpinning and running through all the SDGs, we make a start when we make the invisible, visible.

What can you do?

- Read the next *Invisible News* sheets to educate yourself about the hazards;
- Visit the websites listed to find out more;
- Seek out safe alternatives when buying food, clothing, furniture: READ the labelling;
- Dispose of waste responsibly;
- Discuss with your children, relatives, neighbours.



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