

# **Report on Biosafety Clearing-House Training Workshop**

*September 11-14, 2007, Turkeyen Campus, Centre for Information  
Technology, University of Guyana*

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## **Background**

Guyana became signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1994 and has expressed interest in acceding to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB). One of the key issues addressed by both agreements is Biosafety.

The successful implementation of the CPB requires the establishment of a Biosafety Clearing House (BCH), as part of the Clearing-House Mechanism. The BCH is a web-based storehouse for up-to-date information on Biosafety and LMOs, and is managed by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD). As a result, it is necessary for countries to input and validate their own data in the BCH.

The BCH is a global project implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) with financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to establish the National BCH.

In order to fulfill the requirements under this project, the EPA as the Focal Point for the CBD and the BCH, has established a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral committee known as the Biosafety Task Force. This Task Force is responsible for decision-making involved in the practical development of the BCH project. The EPA has also conducted a series of training workshops through the National BCH Project for a wide range of Stakeholders. These participants were trained in the operation of the National BCH by two Regional Advisors from the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Unit.

## **Objectives of the Training Workshops**

- To provide information on Biotechnology and the Cartagena Protocol;
- To provide information on Policy, Strategy, Law, Regulations and Guidelines;
- To sensitize the participants about Guyana's National obligation in the BCH project;
- To surf the BCH Portal and access information on the BCH; and
- To register and manage information on the BCH Portal.

## **Presentations**

- Overview of Biosafety – Dr. Indarjit Ramdass

The Director, Natural Resource Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, Dr. Indarjit Ramdass, made opening remarks, in which he welcomed the UNEP-GEF Regional Advisors and participants.

In his introductory statement, Dr. Ramdass provided the participants with an Overview of Biosafety and the National Biosafety in Guyana and also shared other countries' experiences relating to biotechnology and biosafety. He expressed

Guyana's support for the establishment of the Biosafety Clearing-House and stated that Biosafety will address the nation's "safety for the environment and human health in relation to modern biotechnology" under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

- Introduction to Biotechnology - Dr. Malachy Dottin, UNEP-BCH, Regional Advisor

The presentation on Biotechnology focused on the use of biological organisms and biological processes towards achieving products or services for commercial use. The following topics were highlighted and discussed: agricultural productivity, nutrition, medicines, social equality and environmental benefits. Additionally, concerns about the adverse effects of products created from the use of Modern Biotechnology on human health were also elaborated.

- Introduction to Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) - Dr. Malachy Dottin

This presentation provided an overview to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and about the establishment of the BCH under Article 20 of the CPB. Dr. Dottin reiterated about the Protocol's functions for the BCH, namely: to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, Living Modified Organisms (LMOs), to assist a Party to implement the Protocol, to enable governments to implement the Protocol and to provide a repository of up-to-date information on LMOs and biosafety.

- Introduction to the Biosafety Clearing-House - Ms. Mary Vasquez, UNEP-BCH, Information Technology Specialist

Ms. Vasquez introduced the participants to the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) and Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH). The CHM intends to develop a global mechanism for exchanging and integrating information on biodiversity and biosafety. The BCH is necessary for Guyana's development as it provides access to information about national laws, regulations, decisions and assessments relating to specific LMOs and builds capacity to ensure the implementation of the CPB.

Countries' decisions were also addressed on the importation or release of LMOs and domestic use of LMOs that may be subjected to transboundary movement for direct use in food, feed, or processing. Additionally, unexpected circumstances were discussed, such as illegal transboundary movement and unintentional transboundary movement of LMOs.

- Surfing the BCH Portal and Finding Information on the BCH - Ms. Mary Vasquez

Ms. Vasquez highlighted the functions of the BCH Central Portal and demonstrated how to find, register and manage information on the Central Portal. This exercise focused on managing user accounts and creating records on the BCH Portal through the following link : <http://bch.biodiv.org>.

- Interactive Module on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

Participants were given BCH Training Modules developed under the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House Project. These interactive modules briefly outline some of the key elements of the Cartagena Protocol that are of importance for the Biosafety

Clearing-House. It includes: briefs on the background to and purpose of the Protocol; application of procedures; and institutional and administrative arrangements.

The modules introduced the participants to measures that ensure adequate protection in the field of safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs resulting from Modern Biotechnology.

### **Participants**

Participants included representatives from the following Organisations:

- Environment Protection Agency;
- National Agricultural Research Institute;
- Guyana Consumers Association;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Agriculture;
- Guyana Revenue Authority;
- Guyana Sugar Co-operation;
- Guyana Rice Development Board;
- Banks DIH;
- Demerara Distillers Limited;
- International Pharmaceutical Agency;
- Edward B.Beharry and Co. Limited;
- Office of the President;
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- Guyana Forestry Commission;
- Guyana School of Agriculture;
- Food and Drugs Department; and
- Media.

The objectives of the training workshops were achieved and participants, particularly members of the BCH Task Force were encouraged to review the Articles under Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Regional Advisors reiterated this importance, since the Task Force is responsible for fulfilling the requirements of the CPB and is critical in functioning and sustaining the BCH.

According to an Evaluation Analysis done by the Regional Advisors, 90% of the participants expressed that the workshop was of great success, the lecture sessions were informative, and the participants' expectations were met.