

UN Paves Route to a Caribbean Free of PCBs and other Notoriously Harmful Chemicals

Seven year, \$9 million project by UNIDO, GEF and BCRC-Caribbean aids eight Caribbean countries

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, October 3, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The road to a Caribbean free of the world's most notoriously harmful, cancer-causing chemicals has been opened by a seven-year, \$9 million UN effort funded by the [Global Environment Facility \(GEF\)](#).

In a region where the environmentally-sound management of chemicals and hazardous waste has been challenged by limited resources, the GEF project for the "Development and Sustainable Management Mechanism for POPs in the Caribbean" has established inventories of POP chemicals, created management mechanisms for demonstration sites, trained hundreds of personnel, and fostered new national programs, including legislation, to help the countries meet their commitments and obligations under an international convention. The outputs of the project have also inspired changes in general public behavior towards waste management.

Known as POPs, Persistent Organic Pollutants are long-lasting, accumulative chemicals including Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, that are slow to degrade and can gradually migrate as far north and south as the Earth's poles.

Historically, POPs have made their way to the Caribbean in imported pesticides, firefighting foams and other products, including transformers, electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) and foreign-used vehicles.

They're also often produced unintentionally through poor waste management and industrial processes, such as the open burning of medical waste, plastics, carpets, textiles, and electronic



The Belize medical waste incinerator sterilizes waste at very high temperature and pressure to kill pathogens and reduce unintentionally produced POPs. Today 80% of the country's medical facilities now comply with sound waste management practices.

waste. The oil and gas industry is another major source.

Not only do POPs harm the environment, but exposure to even low levels in food or the air can increase the risk of cancer, reproductive disorders, immune system alterations and birth defects – all avoidable.

The Stockholm Convention was created to help countries end or reduce their production, use, and/or release of these toxic persistent organic pollutants.

It requires parties to eliminate the production and use of 26 of the listed chemicals, such as DDT commonly used to prevent the spread of malaria,

and PFOS/PFOA (Perfluorooctanesulfonic acid and perfluorooctane sulfonyl fluoride), which have been used to make products more resistant to stains, grease, and water, and to make firefighting foams. Parties are also required to reduce the unintentional creation of POPs

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*Alfredo Cueva, UNIDO
Industrial Development
Officer*

through processes such as medical waste incineration and informal open burning of waste.

The eight Caribbean countries participating in the project – Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago – are all Parties to the Convention.

There was a critical need for POPs management in the region when the project started in 2015 under the United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)), with Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding, and execution support from the Basel Convention Regional

Centre for Training and Technology Transfer for the Caribbean ([BCRC-Caribbean](#)).

“Lack of resources, weak institutional capacity and non-existent or inadequate regulatory frameworks have been stumbling blocks for the Caribbean when it comes to chemicals and waste management”, says UNIDO Industrial Development Officer, Mr. Alfredo Cueva.



POPs are often produced unintentionally through poor waste management and industrial processes, such as the open burning of medical waste, plastics, carpets, textiles, and electronic waste.

“POPs represent a very real threat to human health and the environment in the Caribbean but waste management facilities struggled to keep up as POP pollution was rising with the region’s recent economic growth and consumerism. In fact, one of the project’s first challenges was simply to capture this data accurately, use it to prepare the national implementation plans, and share it region-wide as a new online database and knowledge management system.”



POPs have made their way to the Caribbean in imported pesticides, firefighting foams and other products, including transformers, electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) and foreign-used vehicles.

In each of the eight participating countries, the project comprehensively inventoried their POP chemicals – including DDT and PCBs (two of the original “dirty dozen” POPs under the Stockholm Convention), and the more recent additions to the POP list. Insights from the inventories moved some of the countries closer to eliminating PCBs from their territories, one of the Stockholm Convention’s most important objectives.

Thanks to the project, government officials and electrical utilities personnel are able to properly sample and analyze transformers added or removed from their electrical network.

Further, the project’s legal experts helped draft model legislation for integrated chemicals management, a model that countries can customize to meet their unique needs.

And all eight countries have now updated their Stockholm Convention National Implementation Plans, an important obligation.

Meanwhile, three demonstration projects provide concrete examples of how to manage POPs effectively in the region. These include a sanitary landfill design proposed for Suriname, a remediation plan for the Guanapo landfill in Trinidad and Tobago, and improvements of medical waste disposal in Belize.

This innovative medical waste technology demonstrated in Belize has also been implemented in three other countries: Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Kitts and Nevis.

Other project results include:

* Standard Operating Procedures set for enforcement inspectors

* Awareness raising strategies and a communications toolkit (www.stopthepops.com), contributing to a 30% improvement in regional public awareness of POPs

- * A regional lab with capabilities for POPs analysis
- * Preliminary site and risk assessments of priority contaminated sites
- * Assessments and recommendations for lab equipment and capacity building
- * Finally, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, and Antigua and Barbuda are considering waste segregation to improve recycling and diversion of waste from landfills. These initiatives would help reduce unintentional POPs generation caused by landfill fires and lower dependence on fossil fuels for energy

“We are grateful for and congratulate the project’s leadership in having produced so many tangible results, such as the POPs inventory and updates of National Implementation Plans,” said Ms. Keima Gardiner, President of the Bureau of the Conference of Parties to the Stockholm Convention.

Says Ms. Jewel Batchasingh, Director of the BCRC-Caribbean: “Through the last few years, the BCRC-Caribbean is proud to have served our Party countries in fulfilling our mandate for the region. The project has certainly made some improvements in our regional capacity and we are excited for what the future holds, as we continue to manage the challenges of the environmental sound management of chemicals and waste.”

News release in full, including details of meetings this week in Port of Spain, Trinidad:

<https://conta.cc/3CfRKfj>

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