

REGIONAL CHEMICAL HELPDESK

Joint Initiative of the Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI) and the World Health Organization Regional Office for South East Asia (WHO-SEARO)

Report on “The First Workshop of Users of the Chem HelpDesk”

The Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI), through the Chem HelpDesk, organized the First Workshop of Users of the Chem HelpDesk on April 29th, 2010, at the Chulabhorn Convention Center, Bangkok, Thailand. The objectives for this workshop were to:

- (a) Introduce the Chem HelpDesk to potential users in Thailand;
- (b) Receive feedback from users and identify their needs;
- (c) Identify priority chemicals and concerns in chemical safety, as well as list ongoing chemical safety activities in Thailand; and
- (d) Provide an opportunity for professionals in the field of chemical safety, both from the governmental and private sectors, to meet and exchange news and ideas.

Forty-three participants attended the workshop, from the World Health Organization Thailand Country Office and various governmental agencies and academic institutions involved in the safe management of chemicals in Thailand, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Industry, and Mahidol and Chulalongkorn universities.

The workshop was divided into 2 general sessions:

The first session included the welcome addresses by Dr. Maureen Birmingham, the WHO Representative to Thailand, and Associate Professor Dr. *Khunying* Mathuros Ruchirawat, Vice-president for Research at the Chulabhorn Research Institute, as well as an introduction to the Chem HelpDesk project by Dr. Daam Settachan, and an introduction to the Chem HelpDesk weblog by Ms. Siras Sulanchupakorn, Chem HelpDesk Coordinator, and Ms. Jiraporn Chalermjirarat, Chem HelpDesk Executive Secretary.

The second session was a group session where workshop participants were divided into groups and asked to:

- (I) Address 6 questions provided by the Chem HelpDesk, with the aim of receiving feedback from the users and identifying their needs,

(II) Draft 3 sample questions per group that could be submitted to the Chem HelpDesk, and

(III) Submit the 3 sample questions to the Chem HelpDesk through the weblog and comment on the process.

The aims of II and III were to identify the knowledge gaps that the Chem HelpDesk could help to address for potential users and to receive feedback on the user-friendliness of the current version of the Chem HelpDesk weblog.

Summary of Group Discussions

(I) Participants addressed the 6 questions provided by the Chem HelpDesk as follows:

(a) *What are the priority chemicals for Thailand/ South East Asia Region?*

Asbestos (CFR chemicals), food contaminants, pesticides (organophosphates, carbamates and pyrethroids – paraquat, abamectin), volatile organic compounds, trichloroethylene, TBT, hazardous wastes (including obsolete chemicals/pesticides), flammable compounds, endocrine disruptors, persistent organic pollutants, dioxins, heavy metals (Hg, Cd, As)

(b) *What are the priority Chemical Safety issues in Thailand/ South East Asia Region?*

Users lack of understanding of toxicity/safety (chemical safety information/activities are present but may not reach end-users, e.g. farmers and other chemical users); unlawful disposal of hazardous wastes (accessibility to hazardous waste disposal/treatment facilities is limited); acute & chronic effects; accidents (transport, storage); overuse/misuse; tracking use; misinformation (advertisements); loopholes in laws/regulations e.g. re-distributors; need for additional training related to chemical safety for public health employees, including medical doctors/nurses

(c) *What are the on-going national activities on Chemical Safety?*

Training/seminars (e.g. Chulalongkorn University, Occupational Health and Safety at Work Association); User Guides/Manuals/Brochures and other informative documents (e.g. notice on issues related to health products, risk assessment of arsenic, exposure to pesticide residues by the Department of Medical Sciences, Ministry of Public Health; Development of chemical databases; safety hotlines for users/factories; chemical safety projects for school children (Ministry of Public Health); Chemical safety-related websites (e.g. Chulalongkorn – Chem Track)

(d) *What are the knowledge gaps in the area of Chemical Safety?*

Treatment of medical issues related to chemicals; emergency response; hazardous waste disposal; chemicals in products; nanotechnology; personal protective equipment; toxicity of chemicals

(e) *What are the expectations of the Chem HelpDesk, i.e. how could the Chem HelpDesk best assist Chemical Safety professionals in the country/ South East Asia Region?*

Information presented in the local language (i.e. Thai); “express” cases where questions are answered in less than 7 days; development of a scheme to give end users confidence in quality of answers, especially if names/affiliations of experts are withheld; additional chemical safety information provided on weblog including pressing issues in chemical safety (in addition to the question and answer service); develop the Chem HelpDesk as the national center for all issues related to chemical safety; develop a database of experts in chemical safety that can be contacted directly

(f) *Do you have any other organizations / news / activities related to chemicals / chemical safety that you would like to suggest to the Chem HelpDesk?*

Many websites from the governmental and private sectors have been identified.

The following websites have been added to the ChemHelpDesk webpage:

www2.diw.go.th/haz, www.diw.go.th/iwmb, www.diwsafety.org,

www.chemsafe.chula.ac.th, http://www.diw.go.th/km/km_new/html/index.asp,

<http://www.fda.gov/>, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/>,

http://www.echa.europa.eu/home_en.asp, <http://ecb.jrc.ec.europa.eu/esis>.

(II, III) Participants drafted and submitted 3 sample questions per group to the Chem HelpDesk through the weblog:

The Chem HelpDesk classified all the questions into 7 “types of chemical” (Figure 1), including industrial, agricultural, pharmaceutical, public health, household, naturally occurring and other. Among the questions submitted by the workshop participants, 45% of the questions were classified as **Industrial**, for example, a topic of Risk Assessment of Acrylamide in Food. Twenty percent of the questions submitted were grouped in the field of **Public Health**, for example, the benefit of amino acid addition in beverages. Fifteen percent of the questions were categorized as **Agricultural**, for example, the effect of flavonoids in plants and their stability.

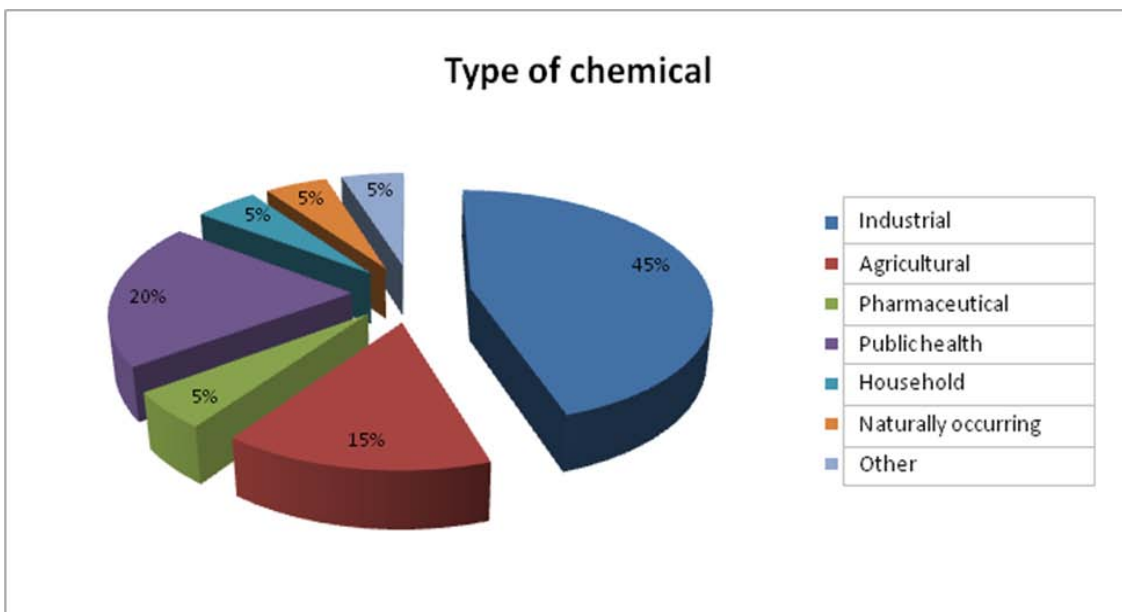


Figure 1: “Type of chemical” from participant’s questions

The process of submitting questions through the Chem HelpDesk during the workshop was efficient. Suggestions from the participants regarding the user-friendliness of the weblog included the addition of a step-by-step guideline that can be viewed while submitting a question.

In summary, this workshop introduced the Chem HelpDesk project to the participants, and received feedback regarding their technical needs in terms of some of the knowledge gaps in chemical safety that need to be addressed, as well as the user-friendliness of the current version of the Chem HelpDesk weblog. The Chem HelpDesk has gathered all comments and suggestions from the participants in order to identify, as well as to make plans to address, these knowledge gaps in the form of a question-answer forum on the weblog. Websites for additional resources and organizations related to chemicals and chemical safety that were suggested by the participants have been added to the Chem HelpDesk weblog. Moreover, the workshop provided a place for the participants to interact and exchange their knowledge and experience regarding chemical safety and chemicals management.