

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Discussion

March 2012

This chapter should be cited as

Working Group on Study on the Feasibility of an Information Infrastructure for the Future Chemicals Management Scheme in the Asian Region (2012), 'Conclusion and Discussion', in Soontornchai, S. (eds.), *Study on the Feasibility of an Information Infrastructure for the Future Chemicals Management Scheme in the Asian Region*. ERIA Research Project Report 2011-15, pp.156-158. Available at: http://www.eria.org/RPR_FY2011_No.15_Chapter_7.pdf

Conclusion and Discussion

1. Conclusion and Policy Implication

1.1. Policy Implications from the Proposal of ASEAN Chemical Safety Database

As the first policy implication regarding the ASEAN Chemical Safety Database, when considering the qualitative advantages and quantitative cost benefits of constructing the database, it is concluded that constructing the ASEAN Chemical Safety Database is efficient from both quantitative and qualitative aspects, and it is deemed worth moving on to a detailed examination in the future.

The main information to be gathered includes two aspects: information on laws and regulations, and information of toxicity to humans, of chemical substances in each country. The information on laws and regulations is beneficial for both industrial circles considering beginning production and exports to other countries, and administrative government agencies using regulations in other countries as guidelines. Moreover, by summarizing and displaying existing toxicity information in a straight-forward list format, persons in charge of administrative government agencies can feasibly use the information when making decisions on the control of substances in the future. Moreover, easily available information can mean that autonomous management within companies is promoted.

Finally, by displaying the information in a form that allows direct comparison, it is possible to expect a secondary effect, where the rules on control substances in related countries will gradually converge toward a common understanding.

1.2. Policy Implications from the Discussion on Further Harmonization

The discussion on further harmonization indicates many potential policy implications. The ASEAN summit held in 2007 clearly set a target for establishing the ASEAN community by 2015, and the target was affirmed repeatedly. Although

chemical management is not clearly mentioned in the documents relating to economic integration of the region, it is recognized that establishing the database and further harmonization have significantly contributed to economic integration in a timely manner.

In addition, enhancing further harmonization in ASEAN and East Asian countries is highly useful from a practical aspect, as explained in Chapter 6. For example, if the option to establish a new center (i.e., the ASEAN Chemical Management Research Center) for this purpose, or for another sustainable framework, could be established, this center would be able to become an entity that provides benefits to many stakeholders. When considering the sustainable operation of the ASEAN Chemical Safety Database as well as the sophistication and the convergence of chemical substance management within the ASEAN region, the existence of a central player who can provide the opportunity for each ASEAN country to cooperate and can provide the leadership within the ASEAN region to promote chemical management is essential. Managing chemicals appropriately without hindering trade and investment poses challenges and may be costly for individual countries. On the other hand, if ASEAN and its partners countries work together through an appropriate mechanism, like the center that has been mentioned here, the future convergence of chemical management in the ASEAN and East Asian region will be more realistic, and this will ultimately lead to the activation of trading and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) within the region.

For this reason, the discussions on further harmonization, discussed in chapter 6 of this report, will be able to play an important role in future ASEAN policies. Moreover, further elaboration of this concept may be useful in order to accelerate economic integration through chemical management.

2. The Next Steps to Be Taken

2.1. Next Step for the ASEAN Chemical Safety Database

The next step for the ASEAN Chemical Safety Database is elaborated in Chapter 5. The most important step will be the endorsement and commitment of countries to establish the ASEAN Chemical Safety Database and its management mechanism.

The commitment may include the following;

- ✓ Agreement from member countries of ASEAN and East Asian partners to proceed
- ✓ Commitment for funding and/or in-kind contribution by some countries in a position to do so
- ✓ Assigning (an) appropriate representative(s) to be a member of management and/or decision making body
- ✓ Providing information on chemical regulations, etc. (Especially CAS NO. base)

2.2. Next Step for the Utilization of the Management Body of the Database

The next steps for the further utilization of the management body of the database are discussed in Chapter 6. As discussed in the chapter, it is appropriate to conduct a study based on the following objective:

“To achieve greater economic integration through chemical management”

It is discussed that the management body of the database has a great potential to strengthen chemical management in a consistent manner in the region. From this point of view, four additional functions are discussed: 1. Technical assistance, 2. GHS convergence, 3. One-stop service, and 4. Providing chemical management tools. However, the detail and scope of each function is not yet clearly defined, and each function may have different benefits, priorities, required expertise, and so on. Thus, to make this concept concrete, and to develop an appropriate strategy to move forward, the function of the body requires further elaboration not only from the point of view of what will be gained but also in terms of feasibilities, including resource implications.