

Adelaide Group Communiqué on the need for international collaboration and global action on land contamination

A call for an International Treaty or Convention for the Protection of Humanity and the Environment from Toxic Contamination

19 September 2011:

Leading contamination scientists today issued a call for international action to tackle the growing risks which toxic contamination poses to human health and the environment around the planet.

The call follows discussion by a group of some 500 eminent scientists at the CleanUp 2011 conference held in Adelaide, Australia last week. This 'Adelaide Group' says:

- Toxic contamination resulting from human activity is a worldwide phenomenon that affects all nations and poses a risk to the health of every individual on Earth, now and in decades to come. Almost every person, including many newborns, carries traces of this contamination in their body tissues and bones.
- Toxic contaminants are now found in most of the Earth's ecosystems, including the atmosphere, soils, fresh water, ocean sediments, polar ice caps as well as our homes, workplaces and food supply. Many hazardous substances are found in wildlife even in areas far from human population centres.
- Contamination observes no national boundaries: the activities of one country often affect others and may become sources of trans-national friction. It must be seen as an international responsibility.
- Many historic and (though less so) present industrial and waste disposal practices risk compromising the health of future generations. We have a moral responsibility to better protect the health of our land, water, air, food, environment and children.
- There are over 83,000 man-made chemicals. Rapid growth in demand for goods and services is leading to the manufacture and dispersal in the biosphere of new chemicals, including nanoparticles, electronic wastes and metals of unknown health risk potential.
- The uncontrolled use of phosphatic and nitrogen fertilisers to increase food production is now seen to be having a significant adverse impact on soils and water worldwide.
- Risk assessment and remediation should be based on effective doses of concern to specified human and ecological receptors.

We propose that transparent, locally-relevant risk-based thresholds or boundaries should be established for priority contaminants – including emerging contaminants – as a prelude to efforts to bring them within accepted safe limits.

We call on governments around the world to enter into an international treaty or Convention for the Protection of Humanity and the Environment from Toxic Contamination, acknowledging the Basel Convention, and modelled on the success achieved by the Montreal Protocol, the Stockholm Convention and, more recently, progress since the Kyoto Protocol.

We propose this be called the Adelaide Protocol, as the concept was first proposed at a conference in this city.

More information:

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