



SAICM/OEWG.3/INF/34

Distr.: General
27 March 2019

Original: English



**Strategic Approach
to International
Chemicals Management**

**Open-ended Working Group of the International Conference
on Chemicals Management
Third meeting**

Montevideo, 2–4 April 2019

Item 3(b) of the provisional agenda*

**The Strategic Approach and the sound management of
chemicals and waste beyond 2020: considerations for the
sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020**

**Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC):
How collective action is transforming the textile industry
in a proactive and systemic way**

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat has the honour to circulate, in the annex to the present note, a report received from the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC), an established non-profit organization, on how collective action is transforming the textile industry in a proactive and systemic way. The report is presented in the annex as received by the secretariat and has not been edited by the secretariat.

* SAICM/OEWG.3/1.

Annex

Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC): How collective action is transforming the textile industry in a proactive and systemic way

Sectorial context

The textile industry is one of the largest industries in the world with an estimated value of US\$ 1.3 trillion that employs more than 300 million people along the global value chain. It is a significant industry for emerging economies and developing countries with their role on the rise. From an environmental and social perspective, the textile industry has still a lot to undertake in order to become fully sustainable. The current system is highly resource-intensive, contributing significantly to environmental challenges in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and use of several hundred potentially hazardous chemicals in the various textile processing steps.

A paradigm shift – from product management to supply chain leadership

In 2011, six global apparel brands joint forces as a response to the Greenpeace DETOX campaign to establish a Joint Roadmap with a mission of catalysing positive change in the discharge of hazardous chemicals across the textile and footwear supply chains. These early beginnings of ZDHC (Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals) marked a significant change from product compliance to establishing a collaborative platform for a proactive supply chain management. Meanwhile the collaboration has grown with ZDHC being established as a non-profit organisation and evolving into a multi-stakeholder initiative with currently 125 global Contributors from brands, retailers, value chain affiliates and associates. The vision of ZDHC is widespread implementation of sustainable chemistry, driving innovations and best practices in the textile, apparel, leather and footwear industries to protect consumers, workers and the environment. Through collaborative engagement, standard and guidance setting, as well as implementation and innovation ZDHC takes a leading role in advancing the safer chemicals agenda of these sectors. The ZDHC standards and activities form the backbone of moving the industry from multiple requirements towards the supply chain to one harmonised global framework on sustainable chemical management and environmental protection.

An integral and holistic approach to sustainable chemical management

Within its setup ZDHC has established three major areas that support its vision of implementing sustainable management best practices and innovations in the textile industry.

The **Roadmap to Zero Programme** is developing guidelines and tools for the industry such as the ZDHC Manufacturing Restricted Substances List (ZDHC MRSL), the ZDHC Wastewater Guidelines and the ZDHC Gateway. Awareness raising and capacity building are in the focus of the **ZDHC Academy** which is a global platform where ZDHC accredited trainer providers organize in-person training sessions on chemical management topics for brands, textile and leather manufacturers as well as policy makers. The **Implementation HUB** serves as vehicle to scale implementation and innovation practices and to support continuous improvement on chemical management and environmental performance through a worldwide ZDHC accredited expert system.

Input management – Setting the global industry standard and moving to safer chemistry

The ZDHC MRSL and the Conformance Guidance are rapidly become one of the most widely used standards in the industry for management of input chemistry. The ZDHC MRSL is a list of currently 191 hazardous chemical substances banned from intentional use in facilities that process textile and leather materials in apparel and footwear. The intent of the ZDHC MRSL is to manage the input of chemicals to the suppliers and remove those hazardous substances from the manufacturing processes. For the substances on the ZDHC MRSL technically feasible and economically viable alternatives exist on the market. The list is science-based and was established following clear principles and procedures

in a multi-stakeholder process. The ZDHC MRSL is a living document and is being updated as needed to expand the materials and processes covered and to add substances to be phased out of the supply chains.

Moving beyond the ZDHC MRSL, the ZDHC Gateway – Chemical Module is a database of safer chemical alternatives that are conformant to the ZDHC MRSL. It supports textile and leather manufacturers to find better chemistry and supports non-regrettable substitution of chemicals. In addition, the ZDHC Gateway enables data sharing, reporting and communication within the supply chains from chemical companies to suppliers to brands and retailers. The intention of the ZDHC Incheck report is to enable textile mills and tanneries to communicate their ZDHC MRSL conformity to brand customers. The ZDHC ChemCheck report is a proof designed especially for chemical companies to demonstrate the conformance level of their products to the ZDHC MRSL and to inform purchasing decisions of manufacturing facilities.

Output management – Verifying sound input management and demonstrating environmental protection

The ZDHC wastewater guidelines were established as a single, unified set of expectations for wastewater discharge quality that go beyond regulatory compliance to ensure that the discharged wastewater does not negatively affect the environment. In addition, ZDHC is also developing a set of guidelines to reduce the release of chemicals not only to water but also to soil and air. The ZDHC Gateway – Wastewater Module allows as a global online platform to register and to share verified wastewater test results of textile mills with the ZDHC community, thereby reducing duplicative testing efforts in the supply chains. The ZDHC ClearStream report has been designed as a supporting tool for suppliers to interpret their wastewater test results and to demonstrate their continuous improvement to brand customers. In order to increase transparency and monitor progress, a Public Disclosure Portal has been established to showcase the global supply chain performance with respect to the conformance to the ZDHC wastewater guidelines.

SAICM beyond 2020 – promising opportunities to collaborate, scale and replicate the ZDHC model

The ZDHC approach has clearly proven over the past years that through industry wide collaboration in a voluntary sustainability initiative tangible change along one aligned, global framework can be achieved. While ZDHC is one of the international sustainability initiatives with steadiest momentum, a collaboration with SAICM could bring uptake and scaling to a new dimension. Such partnership bears the potential to strengthen ZDHC further worldwide beyond the participation of front-running companies to a universal sector participation. The worldwide reach of SAICM could be leveraged to involve textile companies of different sustainability engagement and sizes in the implementation of the ZDHC standards and tools. Raising awareness and building capacity on sustainable chemical management amongst the relevant industry stakeholders is key to such accelerated adoption and universal acceptance across the textile and leather supply chains. The governance of ZDHC's sectorial multi-stakeholder setup and its approach to regional anchoring and support mechanisms could also serve as a model to scale the SAICM approach into global supply chains.

The ZDHC model could also stimulate similar initiatives in other chemical-intensive sectors and find replication in further industries, such as furniture, building, electronics, automotive or cosmetics sectors. Key lessons from the textile sector's journey on chemical management are the need to set a global standard in a collaborative approach that is science based and anchored in an expert multi-stakeholder process. The combination of linking a global framework to concrete priorities and measurable sectorial goals has shown to drive tangible action that lead to improvements and accountability in the supply chains.

Another impactful area of joining forces between SAICM and ZDHC is awareness raising and building of capacity on chemical management at scale. Building knowledge and gaining skills on sustainable practices is one of the most essential ingredients to achieve transformation of the industry. In addition to educating the private sector and its supply chains on environmental topics, it is equally important to build capacity with policy makers on sustainable chemical management and related innovations as a basis for revisions of environmental regulations and sound chemicals policy making.

The success stories learnt from the ZDHC initiative could also inform a global knowledge sharing base that demonstrates best practices and innovation examples on chemical and environmental management and draws lessons for other industries on the way to advance sustainability and sustainable development globally.

Experiences and lessons learned to date could contribute to the development of global reduction targets for chemicals and waste from the textiles and fashion industry.
