



## Indicators for evaluating responsible chemicals management

**A new study** has developed a set of indicators to evaluate how well companies voluntarily manage dangerous chemicals. These indicators can be used to check progress towards the World Summit on Sustainable Development goal of effectively managing chemicals.

**Managing dangerous chemicals** in industry, so that the impact on human health and the environment is minimised, is a goal of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) <sup>1</sup> held in 2002. The aim is to achieve sound management of chemicals, based on a risk assessment approach, by 2020. Therefore there is a need to assess progress of the voluntary actions taken by companies to achieve the WSSD goal of effective chemical management by 2020.

In this study, the researchers propose a new set of indicators that can be used to evaluate chemical management from three different perspectives, in order to gain an overall view of how corporations fulfill their obligations of effective chemical management. The three perspectives are:

- The Science Axis – the quality, quantity and methods underpinning scientific evaluation used by a corporation
- The Capacity Axis – ability of the staff and the organisation to undertake evaluations
- The Performance Axis – how well the staff and organisation provide information, communicate and manage risks to interested parties, such as business partners and the wider community

Each of these three perspectives is evaluated by assessing four activities: hazard assessment, exposure assessment, risk assessment and risk management. Risk management should be designed to respond to the level of risk revealed by the risk assessment exercise. This, in turn, is based on effective hazard and exposure assessments.

In addition, a variety of different industries in Japan were surveyed by the study between 2006 and 2008 to rate how well corporations were progressing towards the WSSD goals. The evaluation indicators were used in the survey to assess changes in company activities that indicate willingness to voluntarily achieve a high degree of responsible chemical management.

A wide variation in achievement was found among different types of industries. The highest levels of effective chemical management were achieved by manufacturers in the pharmaceuticals, rubber and chemicals, electrical appliances, pulp and paper, textiles and clothing sectors. Lower levels of achievement were found among industries related to information and communication, finance and insurance, real estate services and the food industries. However, large differences could also be found among groups of similar industries, for example, in industries primarily using chemicals as raw materials.

In addition, the survey suggests the use of scientific evaluations by companies improved over the three years, as did better social responsibility towards the community and assessments of hazards. In contrast, improvements in risk assessment and risk management are needed to meet the WSSD goals. In Japan, recent changes in chemical control regulations will ensure companies base chemical management on risk assessments.

1. See: World Summit on Sustainable Development [www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt\\_toxichemintegovedeci.shtml](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/susdevtopics/sdt_toxichemintegovedeci.shtml)

**Source:** Kubota, K., Kamizono, A., Miyachi, S. *et al.* (2011) Development and verification of new evaluation indicators for chemical management in corporations to meet WSSD goals. *Journal of Cleaner Production*. 19:1134-1140

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**Theme(s):** Chemicals

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To cite this article/service: "[Science for Environment Policy](#)"; European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.