COP 10 Alert # 3

Finally! Waste Prevention Comes to Basel

Ban Amendment Entry in to Force and Action on National Waste Reduction Foreseen

Written by the Basel Action Network in preparation for the 10th Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention

Clearly the most important issue at the upcoming 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP X) to be held in Cartagena next week is the passage of the Country Led Initiative Draft Omnibus Decision without amendments. That needs to pass by consensus or by vote. But it is imperative that it passes.

However, another very important and closely related outcome of this meeting, lies in the theme chosen by the Colombian government -- Waste Prevention, Minimization and Recovery. The word “recovery” seems to have been oddly thrown into the mix as an afterthought, but it is really “Prevention and Minimization” – those strategies employed before waste is created to reduce both waste hazardousness and quantity, that experts all agree is the most important solution to our waste problems. It is for this reason that waste prevention and avoidance lies at the apex of all waste management hierarchies. Despite this fact, however waste minimization rarely gets the emphasis in action and resources commensurate with its paramount importance.

Certainly, waste prevention has always been a fundamental obligation of the Convention (Article 4, 2, (a)), but little has been done, short of passage of the Basel Ban, to promote it, since adoption of the Convention in 1989. Hopefully this will begin to change at Cartagena.
Not only is waste prevention the theme of the meeting, and the subject of the Cartagena Declaration, but most importantly, the Colombians are envisaging more than just rhetoric, but real action on waste prevention, some of which appears to spring from the Declaration itself and more no doubt will be forthcoming in a decision signaled in the draft declaration’s final paragraph.

As we can read in the posted draft Cartagena Declaration http://www.basel.int/Portals/4/Basel%20Convention/cop10docs/CartagenaDeclaration-30SEPT11.doc, “…efforts will be made to create a global methodology for accurate measurement of national waste generation, and then, on a national basis efforts will be undertaken to measure and record progress in waste prevention…” In addition, pilot projects and capacity building on waste prevention are foreseen.

Also, tied closely to the theme, it must not be overlooked, that the Basel Ban Amendment which COP X will be in a position to finally liberate into coming into force, is, in itself a powerful lever for waste minimization as it forbids the externalization of costs (risk and harm from hazardous wastes) to developing countries from developed countries, and by so doing, eliminates a powerful disincentive for solving waste problems upstream through waste prevention. In other words, by closing the cheap and dirty dumping options for rich industrialized countries, these countries and their waste generators will be forced to either solve the problems at home through green design and clean production methods, or pay very high costs of waste disposal and recycling at home.

Efforts then to break the blockade against the Basel Ban Amendment as proposed in the Country Led Initiative (CLI), are in direct alignment with the vital Prevention theme of COP X. Not only would failure to free the Amendment through the CLI decision be a slap in the face to the very theme and aim of the meeting directly, but many observers believe that until the ban issue is finally solved, the Convention is not likely to be able to finally move forward to fulfill its true destiny, finally solving the global waste crisis by realizing a true paradigm shift to -- Waste Prevention.

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