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17 May 2005

NOTIFICATION

**Improvements to the Biosafety Clearing-House
6 May 2005**

As you may be aware, Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity establishes a Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) as part of the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention, in order to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms; and to assist Parties to implement the Protocol.

Following the transition of the BCH from the pilot phase to the fully operational phase and adoption of modalities for its operation (decision BS-I/3), the Secretariat has received valuable feedback from Governments and organizations regarding several proposed improvements to its operation. Accordingly, the Biosafety Clearing-House website has been revised and enhanced, and I am pleased to announce the launch of the new version of the Biosafety Clearing-House website, which took place on 6 May 2005.

Some of the new features include:

- A new “Biosafety information resource centre”, containing information on available resources such as relevant journal articles, email list-servs, online tools such as databases and search engines, and relevant websites. This database is available at <https://bch.biodiv.org/resources/resources.aspx>;
- Addition of a “virtual mailbox” to assist those BCH users who have limited access to email;
- Improved management of records with information in multiple languages;
- Streamlined design of data entry pages, and simpler editing functions;
- New features for BCH National Focal Points, allowing them to create local databases for frequently used contact details and information about organisms;
- New features for group users, such as capacity-building organizations, to allow all registered members of an organization (or government) to work on the same draft record before it is published;
- A new BCH training site (<http://bchtraining.biodiv.org>) with personal training databases for users, and facilities for trainers to manage records of a small group of trainees.

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cc: Cartagena Protocol National Focal Points
BCH National Focal Points
CBD National Focal Points (where biosafety focal points have not yet been designated)



I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many governments and organizations that have been making their information available through the BCH, which currently contains close to 7000 records.

I would also remind you that in paragraph 3 of decision BS-I/3, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol urged Parties, governments and other users to provide relevant information to the Biosafety Clearing-House as soon as possible, including information pertaining to decisions on the release or import of living modified organisms taken prior to entry into force of the Protocol. The longer-term program of work for the BCH will be considered at the second meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, to be held in Montreal from 30 May to 3 June 2005.

Some features are currently available in English only, but translation will be following shortly. I encourage you to send any feedback and suggestions for improvement of the Biosafety Clearing-House to the Secretariat. The central portal of the BCH is accessible on-line at <http://bch.biodiv.org>.

Yours sincerely,

Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary