

## Maximising opportunities for effective engagement about industrial chemicals

NICNAS carefully plans each community engagement to ensure benefits can be optimised.

This involves:

- identifying key stakeholders
- defining of the aim, objectives and rationale of the engagement
- reviewing past examples and experiences
- developing guiding principles and protocols
- defining the scope and delivering intended outcomes
- identifying resources
- resourcing the engagement
- outlining information requirements and flows as well as capacity-building needs
- organising the engagement process into achievable, measurable units
- establishing realistic timeframes, and
- developing and confirming processes for review, monitoring and feedback.

effective input into policy and decision-making processes regarding the safe use of chemicals.

We work with representatives of civil society, seeking to:

- draw on their expertise and local knowledge of industrial chemicals (including hazards, exposure, controls and use), and
- ensure their equitable involvement in chemical decisions that affect them.

NICNAS is committed to the protocol and set of principles outlined in the Charter. We invite engagement and ask that those who engage and work with us on issues of industrial chemical safety respect these principles.

## NICNAS Community Engagement Charter 2005-06

### NICNAS

Established in 1990, NICNAS regulates industrial chemicals for the protection of people at work, the public and the environment. It operates under the Industrial Chemicals (Notification and Assessment) Act 1989.

NICNAS is accountable to the people and Parliament of Australia for implementing this Charter. The NICNAS CEF endorses the Charter; its members developed and co-authored it with staff of NICNAS in 2004-05.

A companion brochure profiling the Community Engagement Forum is available.

### NICNAS welcomes your input

If you wish to comment on this charter, please contact us on:

**Telephone** (02) 8577 8800  
**Freecall** 1800 638 528  
**Fax** (02) 8577 8888  
**Email** CEF@nicnas.gov.au

**Or write to us at:**  
NICNAS, GPO Box 58, Sydney, NSW 2001, Australia

NICNAS *Regulating chemicals for your protection*  
[www.nicnas.gov.au](http://www.nicnas.gov.au)

NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL CHEMICALS NOTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT SCHEME



## Community engagement

Community engagement is a means by which – in a civil society<sup>1</sup> – people participate in issues that concern them.

Today, when industrial chemicals adversely affect workers, the general public and/or the environment, news spreads quickly. The safe use of chemicals has become one of our community's greatest concerns.

The National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) – the Australian Government regulator for industrial chemicals – acknowledges these concerns and established the Community Engagement Forum (CEF) to provide a means for receiving input about them.

The CEF works effectively. It successfully supported NICNAS in a range of initiatives when amendments to legislation concerning chemicals of low regulatory concern were proposed and is currently actively engaging in the Existing Chemical Program review.

<sup>1</sup> Society in which collective action around shared interests, purposes and values is viable and commonly occurs.

## Supporting the community's right to know about industrial chemicals

Because NICNAS upholds the principles of community right to know identified in the *Bahia Declaration 2000* of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, we are committed to:

- improving public access to chemical safety information
- addressing aspects of the community's 'right to know' in relation to the control and use of industrial chemicals, and
- enabling representatives of civil society – interested persons, organisations and key stakeholders – to have



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**  
NICNAS

**NICNAS is committed to the protocol and set of principles outlined in this Charter. We invite engagement and ask that those who engage and work with us on issues of industrial chemical safety respect these principles.**

## OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Our guiding principles<sup>2</sup> for dialogue with stakeholders about industrial chemical safety issues

### Shared commitment to the process

Participants recognise that the agreed process offers the best opportunity to address the common identified issues.

### Accountability

Participants effectively represent the interests of their constituents and have the support of the wider community. Participants are obliged to identify any conflict of interest, real or perceived.

### Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Participation in the process is voluntary, with the roles and responsibility of all participants clearly defined.

### Openness, procedural fairness and equity

All participants have equal opportunity to contribute to the process and its design. The degree of influence participants have on the outcome is clearly stated. Rationales for all decisions are comprehensively explained.

### Timeliness of decision-making and information delivery

To maximise full and effective participation, decisions are made and information delivered in a timely manner. All participants agree to clear and reasonable timeframes.

### Access to information, expertise and personnel

All participants have equal access to available information and resources to ensure their effective and informed participation throughout the process.

### Easily-comprehended information and flexible processes

Technical information is communicated in a manner that allows informed participation. Flexibility is a feature of the process design, so that change can be adequately handled.

### Continuity

The process is designed to ensure participants are able to be involved throughout. This means that emerging issues or new participants will not be disadvantaged.

### Commitment to consensus

Participants are committed to reaching agreement, despite differences in values, interests and knowledge.

### Feedback mechanisms

The process includes a mechanism through which frequent and open feedback on emerging issues, outcomes of consultations, and any recommendations arising from the process are brought to the attention of relevant stakeholders.



## OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL

Our protocol for public dialogue with our stakeholders

### We accept a shared responsibility to:

**Communicate** in a clear and timely manner, accommodating comments on the scope, aims and expected outcomes for each stage of discussion.

**Offer** comprehensive and timely information to stakeholders to encourage fair and informed discussion of issues, with attention to the inclusion of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

**Provide** key information in plain language for wider civil society consideration, especially when dealing with technical issues, and provide opportunities for community capacity building in chemical safety issues.

**Assist** individuals and groups in practical ways to engage in the consultative process, paying particular attention to stakeholders with special needs and upholding equity and diversity principles.

**Establish** clear and realistic timelines for input, which are sensitive to the resources available to the individuals and groups concerned.

**Give** frequent and open feedback, including information relating to emerging issues, key outcomes from consultations, the nature of interested people's contributions, and any recommendations arising from the process.

**Stimulate** constructive exchange of views and genuinely attempt to address the major priority issues involved.

**Ensure** that people who enter the community engagement process at different stages are incorporated effectively into the process.

**Monitor** and evaluate the effectiveness of the community engagement process, once a year. Individual programs will be monitored and evaluated at frequent intervals during and at the end of each stage of the program.

**Seek** to achieve consensual resolution of disputes with a comprehensively explained rationale for decisions.

**Review** and regularly update contact lists of individuals and organisations with an interest, or a potential interest, in the assessment and management of chemicals. Particular attention should be given to representatives from vulnerable sub-populations.

<sup>2</sup>These principles are based on those developed by Canada's *National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy* and are fundamental to any effective consultative, participatory or consensus process. They underscore our Community Engagement Protocol (opposite).

