

COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE TRANSPORT OF DANGEROUS GOODS AND ON THE GLOBALLY HARMONIZED SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION AND LABELLING OF CHEMICALS

Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

Thirty-second session
Geneva, 3-7 December 2007

Item 11 of the provisional agenda

OTHER BUSINESS

Schedule of meetings

Note by the Secretariat

1. Referring to informal document UN/SCETDG/32/INF.6 – UN/SCEGHS/14/INF.11 submitted by the expert from Canada, and in particular to paragraph 4 which calls for comments from the secretariat, the secretariat would like to offer the following comments:

Current schedule of meetings

2. The total number of meeting days currently allocated to the Committee and its subcommittees is 38 (= 76 meetings) per biennium, with sessions of both sub-committees held every six months back-to-back in order to facilitate proper multisectoral attendance and cooperation, with a single short Committee session at the end of the biennium.

3. These arrangements had been agreed because it became clear at the end of the 1990s that the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods would no longer make full use of the meeting time allocated to it, and that this meeting time could be used for GHS activities.

4. The activities of the Committee and its subcommittees are, for administrative reasons, carried out under the programme budget of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. UNECE meetings have to be approved by the UNECE after consultation of the UNOG Conference Services Division, but the programme of meetings of the Committee and its Sub-Committee has to be approved by ECOSOC itself, also after consultation of the Conference Services Division since the conference facilities (meeting rooms, interpreters, etc.) have to be shared between all UN programmes making use of the Geneva conference facilities. For this reason, the programme of meetings has to be planned a long time in advance.

5. Planning is particularly important in the case of the Committee and its Sub-Committees, because the section of the Transport Division providing the secretariat services is a small unit which has to provide secretariat services to four other UNECE bodies.

WP.15 (two 5 day sessions per year)

WP.15/AC.1 (two 5 or 10 day sessions per year)

WP.15/AC.2 (two 5 day sessions per year)

WP.11 (One 5 day session per year)

6. Sessions of different groups cannot be held simultaneously, and due to the workload related to the preparation of agendas, documentation, reports, etc. a minimum interval of one to two months between sessions is desirable. During sessions, the section still have to carry out duties related to the follow-up to previous sessions or preparation of the forthcoming sessions. For example, at this time, the section has nearly completed but not yet finished its work on follow-up to the last December 2006 Committee session (Availability of some material on CD-ROM and website); is preparing legal texts (amendments to ADR) as a follow-up to the September WP.15/AC.1 and the November WP.15 sessions; is preparing legal texts (amendments to ATP) as a follow-up to the November WP.11 session; is servicing the TDG and GHS sessions; is preparing documents for the January WP.15/AC.2 session; is working on the agenda for the March WP.15/AC.1 session. Therefore, for management reasons, it is difficult for the secretariat to envisage the servicing of meetings for more than two consecutive weeks. Two consecutive meeting weeks represent already a very heavy workload for staff of the section, especially when they include meetings of different bodies.

Comments on the proposal by Canada

7. As noted by the expert from Canada, the time between two consecutive sessions is rather short, and experts do not have always sufficient time to prepare documents before the deadline, especially during the first year of a biennium when they have to attend many other meetings at national or international level relating to the effective implementation of the recommendations issued at the end of the previous biennium.

8. The reduction of the number of sessions from 4 to 3, as proposed by the expert from Canada, could be an option to resolve this problem. Nevertheless, in such a case, the following considerations should be taken into account.

(a) Instauring an interval of 8 months between meetings would imply reconsidering the schedule of meetings of all other UNECE bodies serviced by the secretariat (WP.15, WP.15/AC.1, WP.15/AC.2) accordingly, which is possible but would require consultation with the bodies concerned since they do not deal only with matters related to the implementation of the UN Recommendations on the TDG. This could lead also to a revision of dates of entry into force of amendments to ADR, RID and ADN;

(b) If the Committee's session is not maintained in December, other organizations involved in the process of development (IAEA) or implementation (ICAO, IMO) of the UN Recommendations on TDG should also be consulted, since this change could affect their meeting schedule as well;

(c) The work of the Committee and its programme of work are discussed by ECOSOC every two years in July, therefore it would not be logical to have the first session of the subcommittees in June. The current situation, where the first sessions of the subcommittees are held during the ECOSOC session before this ECOSOC discussion takes place is not entirely satisfactory, and this could be the opportunity to regularize the situation (e.g sessions in September/October; May/June; December).

(d) Consideration should be given to the possibility of just skipping the first July sessions of the subcommittees (at least for TDG).

(e) If the number of sessions is reduced to 3 per biennium, a possible reduction of the total number of meeting days should also be considered, since 38 meeting days cannot be accommodated within 3 sessions of back-to-back meetings within a period of two weeks (i.e. possibility of a total number of 30 meeting days instead of 38). Otherwise, the questions of holding TDG-GHS back-to-back meetings or of holding more than 2 week meetings should also be addressed.
