

**UNECE/OECD Seminar on effective management of technological risks of accidents
triggered by natural hazards**

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Statement by Mr. Marco Keiner, Director of the Environment Division, ECE

Introduction

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to welcome you to the *UNECE/OECD Seminar on the effective management of technological risks of accidents triggered by natural hazards*.

I would first like to express my gratitude to the OECD for its continued partnership with UNECE, including in jointly organizing this seminar, following the UNECE/OECD seminar on fostering implementation of the sustainable development agenda for industrial accidents prevention, preparedness and response at CoP-9 in Ljubljana (2016) and other events.

Today, I wish to call your attention to the risks of natural hazards triggering technological disasters – or Natech risks – and approaches to effectively managing them. Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention have obligations to prevent, prepare for and respond to industrial accidents, including those caused by natural hazards and the adverse impacts of climate change. As these continue to increase and intensify, countries must take action to adapt to climate change and to build resilience at industrial sites to protect human beings and the environment against Natech events for the interest of present and future generations.

Natech risks

Natural hazards, including those resulting from climate change and beyond, can trigger technological disasters and therefore create an additional layer of risk for safely managing many hazardous installations. As examples:

- Floods can cause dams full of hazardous substances to burst.
- Wildfires can spark explosions of stored hazardous substances.
- Thawing permafrost can rupture pipes or structures containing hazardous substances.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report: Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability provides evidence for us to urgently address Natech risks, including due to:

- The ever-growing confidence of the detrimental consequences of projected climate change on humans, societies and the environment;
- The elevated risk of climate-related extreme weather events and slow onset climate events and the impacts of climate change on infrastructure and industrial systems; and

- The need to take measures to adapt industrial activities to the impacts and risks of climate change.

More recently, the discussions and outcomes of the UNFCCC COP-27 included:

- The United Nations Secretary General launching an Executive Action Plan for the Early Warnings for All initiative to achieve early warning systems for all within the next five years, in order to save lives and protect livelihoods;
- The COP Presidency launching an Adaptation Agenda to build climate resilience for 4 billion persons by 2030; and
- Experts drawing attention to how crucial and critical adaptation actions are, while also outlining their limits and that they will not prevent all losses and damage.

I would like to call on UNECE and OECD Member States to embrace findings from the recent IPCC report and outcomes and initiatives from the UNFCCC COP-27 in this forum and to consider them in your national efforts to prevent Natech events and mitigate their effects. Taking urgent action to address the current adaptation gap and to strengthen resilience is essential for sustainable development and for the protection of human beings and the environment in the face of climate change.

Next steps

Such actions could comprise of, among others:.

- Ensuring Natech risks are understood by authorities and operators to enhance management of them;
- Better integrating Natech risks into land-use planning and decision-making on siting to ensure industrial sites are safely located with regards to possible natural disasters and in proximity to people and ecosystems;
- Ensuring risk assessments take into account Natech risks to better understand sufficient safety requirements at particular sites;
- Requiring on-site management plans to include climate change impacts and related adaptation measures; and
- Ensuring contingency plans cover Natech events and their effects for swift responses in case they were to occur.

These and other important actions will be further discussed during the seminar. I would like to stress the importance of taking these actions, including in the implementation of the Industrial Accidents Convention, the forthcoming OECD/UN/JRC guidance document on Natech risk management and other international legal and policy instruments.

Conclusion

I urge all participants to engage in this timely seminar to learn more about Natech risk management and related instruments and guidance for addressing them. I also urge all

participants to promptly take action to prevent Natech events and mitigate their effects, including through the integration of Natech risks into your national policies and governance regimes, transboundary cooperation and exchanges of experience and good practice. Your actions now, especially within the context of climate change and the increasing risks of natural hazards, will determine how many Natech events will occur in the future and the extent of their disastrous effects on human lives, the environment, infrastructure, regional security and economic development.