



14 September 2012 | [MP3](#) at voaspecialenglish.com

A UN Warning About Chemical Dangers

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

The United Nations Environment Program is calling for urgent action to reduce what it says are growing risks from chemicals. The agency says in a new report that better management of chemicals could save millions of lives and billions of dollars.

The [Global Chemicals Outlook](#) report will be discussed next week in Nairobi at the [International Conference on Chemicals Management](#).

An estimated one hundred forty-three thousand chemicals are now produced. Yet the report says only a small number of these chemicals have been studied for their effects on human health and the environment. It says death and disability rates are high from the unsafe use of chemical products.

Sylvie Lemmet is director of the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics at the U.N. Environment Program. She says poor management of chemicals has a high economic cost. For example, she says the cost is higher than the amount of overseas development aid, or ODA, for health care in sub-Saharan Africa.

SYLVIE LEMMET: "If you look at the estimated cost of poisoning from pesticide in sub-Saharan Africa, only the injury and the loss of working time is estimated to be 6.3 billion U.S. dollars in two thousand nine. This is higher than the total ODA that is going to the health sector in the same area."

The U.N. Environment Program estimates that chemical sales worldwide will increase by around three percent a year until twenty-fifty. Chemical production is moving quickly from developed to developing countries. By twenty-twenty, chemical production is expected to increase by forty percent in Africa and the Middle East and thirty-three percent in Latin America.

The agency says one of its biggest concerns is pollution of rivers and lakes by pesticides and fertilizer. Other major concerns are heavy-metal pollution from the production of cement and textiles, and dioxin pollution from mining.

The World Health Organization estimates that more than twenty-five percent of all cases of disease are linked to environmental causes. Maria Neira is director of

the WHO's Department of Public Health and Environment. She says almost five million deaths from these diseases can be blamed on exposure to certain chemicals.

MARIA NEIRA: "It is an enormous figure -- 4.9 million deaths that could be avoided if we have better management in reducing exposure to those chemicals. Obviously, this figure is a very, is an underestimation."

The U.N. report urges the chemical industry and governments to work together to develop safety policies. It says preventing harm costs less than fixing it.

And that's the VOA Special English Health Report. I'm Steve Ember.

Contributing: Lisa Schlein