

Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT CHECKLIST Introduction & References

Introduction

The Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, elaborated under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), was adopted at Espoo (Finland) on 25 February 1991.

If a planned activity is listed in Appendix I to the Convention and it is likely to cause a significant adverse transboundary impact, the EIA procedure as indicated in the Convention will have to be implemented. This procedure starts with a notification by the Party of origin to any Party that it considers to be an affected Party as early as possible and no later than when informing its own public about the proposed activity.

Appendix I to the Convention covers 17 groups of activities to which the Convention applies, such as nuclear and thermal power stations, road and railway construction, chemical installations, waste disposal facilities, oil refineries, oil and gas pipelines, mining, steel production, pulp and paper manufacturing and the construction of dams and reservoirs.

The Convention describes an "impact" as any effect caused by a proposed activity on the environment including human health and safety, flora, fauna, soil, air, water, climate, landscape and historical monuments or physical structures or the interaction among these factors, it also includes effects on cultural heritage or socio-economic conditions resulting from alterations to those factors. It seems that some countries lack experience with the latter part of this definition, as these types of effects have only recently been introduced in relevant legislation. The definition of "transboundary impact" explicitly excludes impacts of a global nature and therefore concentrates on impacts of a local or sub-regional character in the ECE region.

The consideration of "significance" of an adverse transboundary impact will always be part of the decision to apply the Convention. Criteria on the significance of any impact should be set in a general decision-making framework. In some cases, it may be possible to establish generally acceptable criteria on significance. In most cases, however, the conclusion that an adverse transboundary impact is likely to be significant would be based on a comprehensive consideration of the characteristics of the activity and its possible impact.

On November 2-5 1993 in Geneva, the third meeting of the signatories to the Convention was held. Item 15 of the report "Specific Methodological Issues of Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context" (ENVWA/WG.3/R.13) suggests completing a questionnaire (Annex II) to serve in identifying the likely adverse impacts of a proposed activity.

To provide guidance in completing this questionnaire, major types of emissions and other causes of adverse impacts should be known (Annex III). Annex III is the start of an environmental checklist that indicates possible pollutants and their adverse impacts on the transboundary environment. The purpose of this report is to expand upon the examples found in Annex III, and to produce a list of possible impacts and pollutants linked to each of the activities in Appendix I of the Convention.

An Environmental Assessment Checklist has been developed for each activity. Each checklist comprises three columns entitled: Category; Factors; and Comments. The checklist is to be used as a tool to aid in the completion of the EIA.

The items found under the column Categories are defined in Article 1 (vii) of the Convention.

The eleven points listed in this column consist of areas of the environment where a proposed activity may have an undesirable effect. Pollutants generally enter the environment through the mediums of air and water. As they are the means for pollutants to enter into the environment, they are the first two items listed. The remaining nine items consist of areas that may be impacted as a direct result of the activity (such as landscape), or as a result of emissions to air and water (such as climate change, flora). Not all items are applicable to each specific activity; as a result some have been omitted from individual checklists.

The second column in the checklist, entitled Factors, lists pollutants and impacts to consider under each Category. Under the Categories of air and water, the corresponding Factors consist mainly of pollutants. Factors for the other Categories consist of potential changes to existing conditions directly related to the proposed activity or due to the pollutants introduced to the environment as a result of the activity. The items found under the column Factors have been restricted to those which are likely to have adverse transboundary impacts.

The pollutants listed under the categories of air and water have been listed giving consideration to various external variables. Major categories of pollutants (such as organohalogens, heavy metals, inorganic compounds, persistent organic pollutants) are listed in the checklist. Specific pollutants are listed if they are commonly occurring pollutants in specific activities, or if they have been adopted by the ECE to be priority pollutants.

Five reports are referenced in the checklist. These reports include listings of priority pollutants adopted by the ECE. The five reports are: Proceedings of the EMEP Workshop on Emission Inventory Techniques, Regensburg, Germany, 2-5 July, 1991, EMEP/CCC-Report 1/91 (reference 1); Economic Commission for Europe Convention of Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution Task Force on Heavy Metal Emissions June 1994 (reference 2); Economic Commission for Europe, Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (reference 3); Economic Commission for Europe, State of Knowledge Report of the UN ECE Task Force on Persistent Organic Pollutants (reference 4); and Recommendations to ECE Governments on the Prevention of Water Pollution from Hazardous Substances (reference 5).

Other specific pollutants have been listed if they are considered to be long-range transboundary pollutants in a specific activity. These limits were placed on the listing of specific pollutants,

otherwise the checklists would have been exhaustive.

The items listed under the nine other Categories are those that result due to the interaction between air and water emissions and other Categories, or those that occur as a direct impact of the proposed activity. The factors considered have been included keeping in mind impacts which will likely be of a transboundary nature. Site location, surface water, geography, geology and climate will be of major consideration when determining deleterious transboundary impacts.

The third and final column, Comments, has been included for the purpose of this report only. Interactions among Impacts are listed, as well as other comments considered pertinent to the EIA. This column has been completed with information available to the writer and is by no means a complete listing of all interactions, nor are there comments on each item. For an Environmental Assessment Checklist, this column could be used to indicate which Factors are to be considered for the specific activity.

If a specific project were to have known adverse effects on the transboundary environment and the pollutant is not found in the checklist, it would be up to the integrity of the persons performing the EIA to include this in their study.

The checklist is to be used as a guideline to assist in the completion of the final EIA. During the process of the EIA, the proponent will review the checklist, and the items that may be of concern in a transboundary context will be highlighted. Further investigation into the items highlighted will be performed during the process of completing the EIA.

The checklist is designed to be a generic checklist of possible adverse transboundary effects to consider for each of the given activities. Pollutants or impacts may be added or deleted during the exercise as the actual impacts may vary for each proposed project due to such things as technology used, site location and raw materials.

During the process of the EIA, the checklists contained herein will serve as an aid in the completion of requirements for the EIA. The method of using a checklist for a proposed activity is to review it, compile the factors that may result in adverse transboundary impacts, and to add or delete items if required. Once impacts are determined, the proponent should complete further investigations to fulfil the requirements of Appendix I of the Convention.

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