



**BASEL CONVENTION**

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## SUCCESS STORY #2

TACKLING THE ILLEGAL USE OF LEAD ACID BATTERIES ACID IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HAS SAVED LIVES AND RESTORED COMMUNITIES

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**Incorporating the Basel Convention into national legislation had transformative effect**

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A persistent challenge faced by both communities and governments of all levels is the proper disposal of hazardous waste. In a country such as Trinidad and Tobago, the country's largest contributor to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from hydrocarbon and petrochemical sectors with the most important exports being its petroleum and petroleum products, natural gas, chemicals and chemical products, fertilisers and steel products. This has, in turn, over the decades led to continual and substantial increases in the generation of hazardous and other wastes.

This issue becomes even more pertinent when the waste is used for improper purposes. One such community is Wallerfield, in Trinidad and Tobago, which, during the 1990s was the subject of repeated dumping of lead acid batteries from cars.

This inevitably meant that people came into contact with this hazardous waste, including the children who played on these toxic surfaces. This led to the tragedy of children succumbing to lead poisoning. As a result, 10 children were hospitalized - with one child dying - and the issue became central to both the Ministry of Health and the country's Environmental Management Authority (EMA).

Whilst the main driver for change came from the Ministry of Health, the longer-term response was addressed by the EMA. These included remediation activities in the affected areas of Wallerfield, including where the slag was initially dumped, and the relocation of affected residents to elsewhere in the community. More widely still, the response was in effect driven by the terms of the Basel Convention whose purpose

is to control transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and other wastes, minimize their generation and ensure their environmentally sound management.

By 2008, the EMA had drafted the Waste Management Rules and sought public consultation on this subsidiary piece of legislation to the Environmental Management (EM) Act, 2000. This was the enabling legislation for enshrining the Basel Convention in law in Trinidad and Tobago. The EMA is mandated to define which wastes are hazardous wastes, establish requirements for their handling and disposal, establish appropriate standards and design criteria for handling and disposal facilities, and establish licensing and permitting requirements with respect to the management of such wastes. As such, the draft rules included elements such as the registration and permitting of generators, transporters, handlers and disposers of hazardous wastes. This legal instrument also sought to ensure the environmentally sound transportation, storage and disposal of hazardous wastes.

As a result, a regional development strategy for Central America and the Caribbean was drawn up, with financial support from

Canada, to support the environmentally sound management of used lead acid batteries, executed through the Basel Convention Regional Centres for the Caribbean Sub-region (BCRC-Caribbean) and for Central America and Mexico (BCRC-CAM).

During the past 20 years, some training has been provided by international and regional organisations to local stakeholders, particularly to government and regulatory officials, including by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC), the Basel Convention Regional Centre for the Caribbean Sub-region, and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO). Such training has been undertaken primarily through the hosting of workshops and seminars on topics including capacity building in the context of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, chemicals safety management, and management of specific hazardous waste streams such as asbestos, pesticides and used lead-acid batteries.



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