



About the OECD

The OECD is an intergovernmental organisation consisting of 30 industrialised countries including Australia. The basic aims, established in 1960, are

"to promote policies designed:

- a) to achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in Member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy;*
- b) to contribute to sound economic expansion in Member as well as non-member countries in the process of economic development; and*
- c) to contribute to the expansion of world trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis in accordance with international obligations."*

The 30 Member countries of the OECD are linked by a community of interests, common problems, a commitment to the market economy, a democratic system and - because of their combined economic weight - common responsibilities to the world at large.

The OECD's supreme authority is the Council, in which representatives of all Member countries participate under the chairmanship of the OECD Secretary General. Meetings of the Council are normally attended by each country's permanent representative. For Australia, this is a representative from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who is based in Paris. Once a year, the Council meets at ministerial level, chaired by one Member country, and brings together ministers of foreign affairs, finance, trade and other leaders.

The OECD is a centre for discussion where governments express their points of view, share their experiences and search for common ground.

The OECD acts through consensus and this is reflected in the Acts of the OECD Council. The 1989 Decision-Recommendation on Compliance with GLP is an example of such an Act.

Within the OECD there are more than 150 committees, working parties and expert groups, covering a wide range of subjects, some broad in scope, others technical and highly specialised.

The Chemicals Programme

Problems related to contamination of the environment by chemicals are dealt with in the OECD through a specific programme on chemicals. This work began in 1971 under the Chemicals Group, which at that time concentrated on concerted action by Member countries on the control of several specific, very persistent, chemicals – eg PCBs, mercury, cadmium, CFCs.

It was soon recognised, however, that dealing with a few specific chemicals per year was not sufficient to protect people and the environment from exposure to those hazardous chemicals that were not already covered in a regulatory framework in Member countries. In the early 1970's several countries were already developing policies for routine scrutiny of chemicals before marketing and use, in order to avoid the inadvertent release of harmful chemicals into the environment. At this time countries began to be concerned that the emerging, and potentially differing, national chemicals policies might bring about distortions in international trade among OECD countries and that the efforts in each country to assess a chemical's potential hazards might be unnecessarily duplicative. Thus, OECD work on chemicals soon moved away from reactive, concerted action on specific hazardous chemicals to the development of the policies and technical instruments needed to support more broadly-based pro-active approaches to chemicals control.

This ambitious agenda led to the creation in 1978 of a larger special extra-budgetary programme within the OECD on the Control of Chemicals. Together with the Working Party on Chemicals, Pesticides and Biotechnology, the Chemicals Committee works under the umbrella of the Environmental Policy Committee to carry out the work related to the international dimensions of protecting human health and the environment from the potential hazards of chemicals. It also oversees work on chemical accidents, safety in biotechnology and pesticides.

As one of the first priorities under the Special Programme, Member countries recognised the need to encourage the generation of valid and high quality test data for chemicals assessments. This issue became central to the work of the Chemicals Programme. Countries were concerned about the cost burdens associated with testing and the need to utilise more effectively scarce test facilities and specialist manpower. The possible duplication of effort, as well as the potential barriers to trade, which could result if Member countries had different test procedures and standards for laboratory conduct, were also recognised and this led to the adoption of a cornerstone Decision – The Mutual Acceptance of Data Decision.

The Mutual Acceptance of Data Decision

The OECD Council Decision on Mutual Acceptance of Data in the Acceptance of Chemicals [C(81)30(Final)] was endorsed by the OECD Council in 1981. This states that:

“data generated in the testing of chemicals in an OECD Member country in accordance with the OECD test Guidelines and the OECD Principles of Good Laboratory Practice shall be accepted in other Member countries for the purposes of assessment and other uses relating to the protection of man and the environment”.

In 1989, a second Council act related to GLP was endorsed - The OECD Council Decision-Recommendation on Compliance with the Principles of Good Laboratory Practice [C(89)87(Final)]. This Act requires national GLP compliance monitoring programmes to be based on inspections and study audits and for a national GLP compliance monitoring authority to be designated. It also requires that authorities for international liaison are identified, information concerning monitoring procedures is exchanged and, it established a system whereby information concerning compliance of a specific test facility can be sought by another Member country.

The OECD Mutual Acceptance of Data (MAD) system saves governments and chemical producers millions of dollars every year by allowing the results of a variety of safety tests done on chemicals and chemical products, such as veterinary chemicals and pesticides, to be shared across the OECD. The MAD agreement requires that testing be carried out using OECD standards for test methods (the OECD Test Guidelines or their equivalent) - and for data quality (the OECD Principles of Good Laboratory Practice).

The OECD Working Group on GLP

One of OECD's important activities in the past decade and a half has been to promote international harmonisation of the whole GLP system - including the Principles of GLP, their implementation, the performance of compliance monitoring, and information exchange among national Monitoring Authorities, and to extend this system to non-OECD countries. Only when a working system is completely in place can the quality of test data be assured on an international scale.

The Working Group on GLP, comprising the heads of national GLP compliance monitoring authorities, oversees all the work in OECD on GLP and compliance monitoring in order to ensure common positions on policy and administrative issues. Training Courses are held for GLP inspectors, an activity which lies at the basis of harmonising monitoring procedures. Consensus Workshops result in Consensus Documents on the harmonised application and interpretation of the GLP principles in specific areas (eg Document No 13 – The Application of the OECD Principles of GLP to the Organisation and Management of Multi-site studies) or on specific points (such as quality assurance or the role of suppliers or the sponsor). The Working Group oversees a programme for mutual examination of national compliance monitoring programmes based on an on-site evaluation visit to ensure continued confidence in procedures used.

A staff member from the NATA's GLP Program attends these meetings as part of its role as the GLP compliance monitoring authority for Australia.

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