Background

Chemistry touches every part of modern life—from lifesaving medicines and clean water technologies to the materials that build our homes and power our devices.

Yet the same knowledge that fuels these benefits can, in the wrong hands, produce some of the most horrific weapons ever devised.

Today, 193 countries stand behind the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), first signed in 1993, committing to never, under any circumstances:

- develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons, or transfer, directly or indirectly, chemical weapons to anyone;
- use chemical weapons;
- engage in any military preparations to use chemical weapons;
- assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention.

That promise has yielded historic results: by 2023, 100% of the world's declared chemical weapons stockpiles were irreversibly and verifiably destroyed.

But eliminating stockpiles is not enough. To prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) works with chemistry practitioners around the world to foster a culture of ethical science. In 2015, OPCW and international experts developed The Hague Ethical Guidelines to promote the responsible and peaceful use of chemistry.

The Hague Ethical Guidelines are a cornerstone of OPCW's broader mission: working together for a world free of chemical weapons.

www.opcw.org/hague-ethical-guidelines

@OPCW

/OPCWONLINE

/OPCW/COMPANY

/OPCWONLINE

/OPCW

The Hague Ethical Guidelines

Shared principles guiding chemistry practitioners toward responsible conduct and the prevention of chemical misuse

Why Ethics Matter

Every chemistry practitioner—whether a scientist, engineer, technician, teacher, regulator, or anyone who handles chemicals—has a role to play to ensure that chemicals are used solely for peaceful purposes.

In 2015, experts from 24 countries across all regions of the world met in The Hague to define and harmonise key elements of ethical guidelines related to chemistry applications, drawing on existing codes.

- **They are not a one-size-fits-all rulebook.**
  Each sector can adapt the language to its specific realities while staying true to the core values.
- **They don't need to mention "chemical weapons" to support the Convention.**
  A code can advance the goals of the CWC by embedding principles of peace, safety, and accountability—even without explicitly referencing chemical weapons or the CWC.
- **They are meant to inform both new and existing codes of conduct.**
  The Hague Ethical Guidelines offer a foundation for ethical standards for chemistry practitioners. Whether drafting new codes or updating existing ones, the key elements should be incorporated and tailored as needed, ensuring alignment with the spirit and objectives of the CWC.

Taken together, The Hague Ethical Guidelines offer key elements that should be applied universally to ensure chemistry is used only for peaceful purposes.

Key Elements

Core Element

Achievements in the field of chemistry should be used to benefit humankind and protect the environment.

Sustainability

Chemistry practitioners have a special responsibility for promoting and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals[1] which set out to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to thrive.

Education

Formal and informal educational providers, enterprises, industry and civil society should cooperate to equip anybody working in chemistry with the necessary knowledge and tools to take responsibility for the benefit of humankind, the protection of the environment and to ensure relevant and meaningful engagement with the public.

Awareness and Engagement

Teachers, chemistry practitioners, and policymakers should be aware of the multiple uses of chemicals, specifically their use as chemical weapons or their precursors. They should promote the peaceful applications of chemicals and work to prevent any misuse of chemicals, scientific knowledge, tools and technologies, and any harmful or unethical developments in research and innovation. They should disseminate relevant information about national and international laws, regulations, policies and practices.

Ethics

To respond adequately to societal challenges, education, research and innovation must respect fundamental rights and apply the highest ethical standards. Ethics should be perceived as a way of ensuring high quality results in science.

Safety and Security

Chemistry practitioners should promote the beneficial applications, uses, and development of science and technology while encouraging and maintaining a strong culture of safety, health, and security.

Accountability

Chemistry practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that chemicals, equipment and facilities are protected against theft and diversion and are not used for illegal, harmful or destructive purposes. These persons should be aware of applicable laws and regulations governing the manufacture and use of chemicals, and they should report any misuse of chemicals, scientific knowledge, equipment, and facilities to the relevant authorities.

Oversight

Chemistry practitioners who supervise others have the additional responsibility to ensure that chemicals, equipment and facilities are not used by those persons for illegal, harmful or destructive purposes.

Exchange of Information

Chemistry practitioners should promote the exchange of scientific and technical information relating to the development and application of chemistry for peaceful purposes.

1 https://sdgs.un.org/goals