



The Scientific Advisory Board

The states that negotiated the Convention on Chemical Weapons (CWC) knew that in order for the Convention to remain relevant and avoid the problems of earlier chemical weapon treaties, the CWC would have to be adaptable. Both the Convention and its implementing body, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), are intended to adapt not only to shifts in the international environment and the changing needs of States Parties, but also to respond to scientific and technological developments. To this end, the Convention foresees that the States Parties should 'review scientific and technological developments that could affect the operation of this Convention'. To provide States Parties with the expertise needed for such a review, Article VIII, paragraph 21 (h) of the CWC mandates the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) to monitor developments in science and technology and assess their impact on CWC implementation. The OPCW Conference of the States Parties (see Factsheet 3 on OPCW structure) addressed this issue at its second session in December 1997 when it instructed the Director-General to establish such a body.

Structure and Function of the Scientific Advisory Board

The SAB is a subsidiary body of the OPCW, enabling the Director-General to provide specialised advice in science and technology to OPCW policy-making bodies and Member States. The SAB reports to the Director-General, who then makes the Board's reports available, alongside his own response, to the Executive Council and the public. Every five years, the SAB prepares a comprehensive report for submission to the review conference. The SAB held its first meeting in 1998 and meets once or twice per year at the OPCW's headquarters in The Hague.

The SAB consists of 25 members, each of whom is an expert in one or more technical fields relevant to the Convention. SAB members serve in their individual capacity as independent experts. States Parties nominate candidates, and the Director-General makes the final selection, keeping in mind the need for geographical balance. Members are appointed for three years and can serve two consecutive terms. Members are drawn from universities, industry, defence organisations and other institutions. Only citizens of OPCW member states are eligible for SAB membership. Every year the SAB elects a Chair and Vice-Chair from its members.

Cooperation is important. The SAB coordinates with the OPCW Technical Secretariat, which provides support for SAB activities. The board invites experts from other international organisations, scientific institutes and industry associations to make presentations at meetings of the SAB and its temporary working groups (TWGs). Members of the SAB and its working groups also share their views with the scientific and industry communities by presenting at conferences.



Members of the Scientific Advisory Board in 2014

Funding for SAB activities comes from the OPCW's regular budget and voluntary contributions. A trust fund for the Board was set up in 2006. 14 States Parties and the European Union have contributed.

Past and Present Temporary Working Groups

Chemical Weapons Destruction Technologies	1999 – 2000
Reviewed technologies for the destruction of chemical weapons.	
Equipment Issues	1999 – 2000
Examined issues related to equipment for inspections and on-site monitoring of chemical weapon destruction operations.	
Analytical Procedures	1999 – 2000
Addressed alternative inspection methods, the use of analytical equipment belonging to the inspected State Party and possible inclusion of non-Scheduled chemicals in the Central OPCW Analytical Database.	
Ricin Production	1999 – 1999
Examined how and at what stage production of ricin should be reported.	
Adamsite	1999 – 1999
Determine whether adamsite is an acceptable riot control agent and criteria to be taken into account when declaring holdings of adamsite.	
Low Concentration Limits for Schedule 2A and 2A* Chemicals	2000 – 2000
Examined the concentration level at which mixtures of chemicals containing Schedule 2A and 2A* chemicals should be regulated.	
Biomedical Samples	2004 – 2007
Examined whether the OPCW Laboratory and designated laboratory network can develop the capacity to analyze biomedical samples.	
Sampling and Analysis	2007 – 2012
Examined issues relating to the collection and analysis of samples for verification purposes.	
Convergence of Chemistry and Biology	2011 – 2013
Examined the risks and benefits that rapid advances in life sciences pose to the Convention.	
Education and Outreach	2012 – 2014
Examined how to raise awareness of the Convention and build relationships between the OPCW and the scientific community, the academic community, chemical industry, international organisations and other groups.	
Verification	2013 – 2015
Examined verification technologies, methodologies and equipment.	

Issues for the SAB

Science and technology underpin almost every aspect of the Convention, from complex verification procedures to the CWC's most fundamental definitions. Science, technology and world events can change rapidly, requiring new insights and understandings to ensure the OPCW and the Convention can respond. Therefore, the SAB is called upon to provide guidance on a wide range of issues. Some of the topics on which the Director-General has recently asked the SAB for advice include medical treatment for blister and nerve agents, riot control agents (RCAs), new approaches to verification, and education and outreach in science and technology. The SAB also provides expert advice on any proposed changes to the Schedules of Chemicals (see Factsheet 7).

In addition to its ongoing activities, the SAB has temporary working groups to provide recommendations on specific issues within specific timeframes. The Director-General establishes these working groups in consultation with the SAB. The SAB Chairperson appoints one member of the SAB to chair each TWG, and the Director-General appoints additional experts to serve as members of the group based on suggestions from OPCW member states and the SAB. Only citizens of member states are eligible to be members of a working group. At the end of the group's mandate, it submits a report of its findings to the SAB and Director-General.

Since its creation, the SAB has had eleven TWGs on the following topics: the convergence of chemistry and biology; verification; education and outreach; sampling and analysis; ricin production; analytical procedures; on-site monitoring equipment; chemical weapon destruction technologies; adamsite; low concentration limits for Schedule 2A chemicals; and biomedical samples. See the summary table on the left for details.

As of October 2014, the Board has one active temporary working group, on Verification. Two other temporary working groups, on the Convergence of Biology and Chemistry and on Education and Outreach, ended their mandate in 2013 and 2014, respectively. TWG and SAB reports are publically available on the SAB website at www.opcw.org/about-opcw/subsidiary-bodies/scientific-advisory-board.

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