

Transformative Actions for Water and Ocean Health: Tackling Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in the Mediterranean Region



What Are Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)?

POPs are toxic chemicals that persist in the environment, accumulate in living organisms, and spread across air and water, posing serious risks to human health and ecosystems.

Key Risks

- Persistent contamination in water, soil, and air
- Bioaccumulation in marine and freshwater species
- Long-term low-level POPs exposure can have health risks

MedWaves, the UNEP/MAP Regional Activity Centre for SCP

MedWaves operates in support of two international treaties: the Barcelona Convention for the environmental protection of the Mediterranean Region and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The centre offers technical support and innovative solutions to Mediterranean countries, targeting pollution reduction and environmental protection, engaging both the public and private sectors.



MedWaves in Action

- Assisting Mediterranean nations with POP elimination
- Providing technical assistance and eco-innovation solutions
- Driving sustainable marine and coastal development

The Stockholm Convention: A Global Treaty to Combat POPs

Adopted in 2001, the Stockholm Convention mandates countries to eliminate or reduce POPs and find safer alternatives. By fostering international cooperation, the treaty ensures long-term environmental security and supports efforts to manage the disposal of POPs safely.



Goals

- Elimination of POP production and use
- Safe disposal and alternative solutions
- Capacity building and international cooperation

MedWaves' Role in the MedProgramme

MedWaves is a pivotal partner in the "Mediterranean Sea Programme: Enhancing Environmental Security MedProgramme" and the Child Project 1.1 (GEF 9684) "Reducing Pollution from Harmful Chemicals and Wastes in Mediterranean Hotspots and Measuring Progress to Impacts" which focuses on reducing pollution from POPs and mercury in critical Mediterranean hotspots (Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia).



1.1
Reducing Pollution
from Harmful Chemicals
and Wastes in Mediterranean
Hot Spots and Measuring
Progress to Impacts



Target Pollutants

- PFOS in firefighting foams
- HBCD in polystyrene panels
- SCCP in PVC (in Lebanon)

Approach

- Implementing preventive legislation to reduce POP use and production
- Providing technical assistance and capacity building for policymakers
- Conducting extensive sampling and analysis to assess contamination levels and environmental impact
- Facilitating match-making mechanisms for the private sector to promote toxic-free alternatives
- Mainstreaming results and best practices within the governance framework of the Barcelona Convention

Sampling Efforts

Sampling in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon will be vital for identifying the presence and concentration of POPs in sediments, groundwater, leachates, and other key environments. This data informs regulatory change and highlights the urgency of finding safer alternatives.

Sampling Focus

- Landfills and firefoam-contaminated areas
- Sediment & groundwater analysis
- Monitoring leachates in construction materials

Expected Outcomes

- Concrete evidence of POP contamination
- Driving regulatory change
- Implementing safer, eco-friendly alternatives

POPs and Water Pollution: Protecting Global Water Systems

POPs migrate from land to water systems, threatening freshwater and marine ecosystems. Once in water, they accumulate in marine organisms, moving up the food chain and posing serious risks to aquatic life and human health.



Key Impact Areas

- Groundwater contamination from POPs
- Marine ecosystem disruption
- Human health risks

