

Chemical use inflicts mounting bill on poor countries: UN

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A farmer in Pila town, south of Manila sprays pesticide on his rice farm in 2008. The spiralling use of chemicals, especially in developing countries, is inflicting a rising bill by damaging people's health and the environment, according to a UN report issued.

The spiralling use of chemicals, especially in developing countries, is inflicting a rising bill by damaging people's health and the environment, according to a UN report issued on Wednesday.

Formerly small-scale consumers and producers of chemicals, developing economies now represent the fastest-growing sector of this industry, importing or making compounds for manufacturing and agriculture.

The substances go into making mobile phones, personal computers and [plastic components](#) for cars, as well as dyes for textiles, pesticides for

farming and detergents and adhesives for [household products](#).

But many countries lack safeguards for handling chemicals safely or disposing of them properly, according to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report, entitled "Global Chemicals Outlook".

Western industrialised economies still account for most of the world's chemical production, but developing giants Brazil, China and India, as well as Russia and other transitioning economies, are catching up fast, it says.

Between 2000 and 2010, chemical production in China and India grew at an annual rate of 24 percent and 14 percent respectively, compared to between five and eight percent in the United States, Japan and Germany.

Global chemical sales are likely to increase by about three percent a year until 2050, says the report.

Africa and the Middle East are set to register a rise of 40 percent in chemicals production by 2020, with Latin America expected to see a 33-percent rise.

This intensification carries a risk.

"Poor management of [volatile organic compounds](#) is responsible for global [economic losses](#) estimated at \$236.3 billion (188 billion euros)," UNEP said.

"Exposure to mercury results in health and environmental damage estimated at \$22 billion."

In just one year, [water pollution](#) caused \$634 million in damage to [commercial fisheries](#) in China, it said.

Between 2005 and 2020, the accumulated cost of illness and injury linked to [agricultural chemicals](#) on small farms in sub-Saharan Africa could reach \$90 billion.

In Ecuador, villagers living near an oil drilling site bathed in and drank water that had up to 288 times the permitted maximum in Europe, the report said.

UNEP called for smarter use of chemicals, including low-dosage use of agricultural compounds and safer and more efficient recycling instead of dangerous techniques to recover gold and copper from electronic waste.

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