

IMO DIPLOMATIC CONFERENCE and Tributyltin (TBT)

A Diplomatic Conference was held at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) headquarters in London from October 1-5, 2001 to adopt the international Convention on the Control of Harmful Antifouling Systems for Ships. This Convention, or treaty, presently only pertains to TBT-based antifouling systems. The Conference was attended by 72 States, one associate member, two intergovernmental organizations and 23 non-governmental organizations. The Diplomatic Conference resulted in the adoption of the Convention which now must be ratified by the member states before entering into force. The key components of the treaty which directly pertain to our customers and stakeholders and their use of TBT-based marine antifoulant paints are:

1. The Effective Dates

The provisional dates from the drafts were retained in the treaty. The treaty prohibits the application of TBT-based antifoulant paints on or after January 1, 2003. As of January 1, 2008, TBT-based antifouling systems must be removed or sealed with a sealer-coat. The treaty will be legally enforceable once it enters into force.

2. Entry-Into-Force

The treaty states “The Convention shall enter into force **12 months after the date** of which not less than **25 States**, the combined merchant fleets of which constitute not less than **25 % of the gross tonnage of the world’s merchant fleet** have ratified it. It appears this date will be sometime after January 1, 2003 since it is highly unlikely that the required ratification will be received by January 1, 2002. Application of TBT paints will therefore be banned as soon as the treaty “enters into force”.

3. Sealing vs Blasting

A choice between blasting or sealing is allowed. As an alternative to full blasting of the TBT-based system from the hull of a vessel, the treaty allows an option such that a ship “shall bear a coating that forms a barrier to such compounds leaching from the underlying non-compliant antifouling systems.”

4. Precautionary Principle

The text included essentially says that if there is a threat of serious or irreversible damage when using any antifouling system in the future, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used to prevent a decision to proceed with the evaluation of a proposal to ban that antifouling system. However, there must be full consideration of the cost-effectiveness of such a proposal, including the total cost to international shipping and other relevant sectors.

ATOFINA will support the decision of the IMO and take appropriate actions to help ensure a smooth transition for our customers and the industry from TBT-based antifoulant paints to those self polishing copolymer (SPC) systems based on silyl acrylates, the best substitute technology currently available. We encourage you to periodically check the ATOFINA Additives website for new updates.