

Function of the Secretariat

The Scientific Secretariat organises and coordinates the work of the Commission and is responsible for verifying the content, for editing and for publishing the List of MAK and BAT Values and the scientific documentation. It participates in conceptual work, such as the development of new evaluation criteria for carcinogenic, germ cell mutagenic or allergenic chemical substances, and maintains contacts with national and international expert committees. The ability of the Permanent Senate Commission for the Investigation of Health Hazards of Chemical Compounds in the Work Area (MAK Commission) to carry out its mandate is therefore crucially supported by the work of the Secretariat.

The Scientific Secretariat of the MAK Commission currently has its headquarters at the office of the commission's chairperson in Karlsruhe and in Freising-Weihenstephan. Other staff members are based at the scientific institutions of the working group leaders. These are mostly scientific staff who are assisted by non-scientific staff in organisational and technical matters.

The Secretariat's tasks consist of the organisation and implementation of the work of the Commission. The scientific staff of the Secretariat conduct literature research, summarise the results and carry out preparation and follow-up work for meetings, in particular writing drafts of justifications and keeping records of the discussion, its incorporation in the justifications and its publication. The scientific staff also present research results and the current status of scientific knowledge at meetings. In addition, they respond to a wide range of queries from the scientific community, authorities, members of the public and the press, or forward these queries to experts. The non-scientific staff of the Secretariat support the work of the Commission by organising working group meetings, procuring literature and compiling meeting documents. They also ensure the necessary documentation of data and information, archiving and the publication of the Commission's decisions and the justifications for them by sending these to the publisher. Because the decisions of the MAK Commission and their justifications have international significance, the Secretariat also translates them into English.

Another important task of the Secretariat is the coordination and support of the Commission's cooperation with other bodies, especially international bodies, of relevance to the health-related evaluation of chemicals and other occupational health and safety issues. This includes, for example, assisting the Commission to draft justifications and comments and exchange information with the Committee on Hazardous Substances (AGS) and its working groups and, internationally, with the Scientific Committee on Occupational Exposure Limits (SCOEL), the Dutch Expert Committee on

Occupational Standards (Health Council of The Netherlands), the TLV and BEI Committees of the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH), the Instituto Nacional de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo (INSHT) in Spain and organisations of relevance to occupational safety in Austria, Switzerland and other countries.

Sustaining the complex interaction between the Commission's various working groups, the interdisciplinary and voluntary members of the Commission and any additional experts who may be required, while enabling the exchange of information with other national and international bodies and at the same time responding to the high demand for the review of chemical substances to a quality-assured standard, requires professional organisation and management of the Secretariat. The Scientific Secretariat is currently managed by Dr. Heidrun Greim.

The decisions of the MAK Commission and the justifications for them are subject to very high quality standards. For this reason, the discussion of a substance is normally the joint responsibility of several different scientific staff members in the Secretariat. Because several people are involved, this approach ensures more extensive and comprehensive literature research on individual substances. It also represents an internal quality check of the documents produced as the basis for discussion and the documentation of the discussion process itself.