

Policy Brief

Input to the first session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) in Geneva, Switzerland on 2-6 February 2026

Conflicts of Interest in the Assessment of Chemicals Waste and Pollution

Having clear provisions for dealing with Conflict of Interest is critical for the success of the ISP-CWP.. Specifically, experts with a *Conflict of Interest* participating in the decision-making process and the core work of the ISP-CWP would come with a high risk of biasing outcomes and/or delaying the activities of the ISP-CWP.

The Conflict of Interest policy and compliance monitoring for the ISP-CWP must be decided. Failure to manage Conflicts of Interests in the ISP-CWP may result in:

- conflicting and/or incompatible outcomes,
- delaying activities (and hence wasting funding),
- eroding trust in science and scientists.

What is Conflict of interest (Col)?

Col refers to *financial or other related interests which could significantly impair an individual's objectivity or create an unfair advantage for any person or organization.*

Every expert holds a particular point of view or perspective that could be seen as biased, but a Col only arises when an individual, while pursuing the scientific question at hand, could have a *direct and material gain from a certain outcome* of this scientific work so that this gain is in conflict with the impartial investigation of the scientific question.

How can Col impair the ISP-CWP's work?

The intent and outcome of Col is to alter an outcome to for financial or other material gain. More than 24 strategies and tactics have been used by those with Col to counter scientific evidence or to promote narratives favorable to specific industry sectors.

Recommendations for the ISP-CWP

- Define and strictly enforce rigorous Col provisions. Experts with a Conflict of Interest should not be allowed to participate in the decision-making process and the core work of the ISP-CWP but may still participate and contribute as observers.
- Implement independent audits to a) review compliance with the Col provisions, and, if needed, recommend corrective measures to the governing body, and b) ensure that the ISP-CWP's outputs are transparent, impartial, credible and scientifically robust, as mandated by UNEA Resolution 5/8.
- Include as many elements of transparency as possible. Also, the ISP-CWP should become a vigorous proponent of FAIR and CARE principles for scientific data management and stewardship.

Examples of Col "methods" include:

1. Criticizing study designs or overemphasizing the shortcomings of scientific studies.
2. Discrediting, intimidating or threatening scientists.
3. Publishing misinformation, e.g. through scientists employed by consulting companies that specialize in supporting private interests.
4. Hiding or obscuring the sources of funding for research.
5. Cherry-picking data, designing studies to fail or come to a desired conclusion, or conducting meta-analyses that dilute scientific evidence.
6. Extensive lobbying towards regulators and policymakers so that the voice of the vested interest is often the main or even the only one heard in public consultations.

For a compilation of documented examples, please see section 4 in the full paper.

Full open access paper:



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For detailed background information, please refer to:
Schäffer et al. 2023. Conflicts of Interest in the Assessment of Chemicals, Waste and Pollution. ES&T,
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