18 February 2014 – An estimated 200,000 tons of obsolete pesticides, around 40 per cent of the world's stockpiles, can be found in Belarus and the 11 other former Soviet republics, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

"Kept in tens of thousands of unprotected sites, they pose a serious threat to peoples' health and the environment," FAO reported.

Over the next two and a half years, the United Nations food agency will provide technical assistance to Belarus in managing its stocks of obsolete pesticides. announced .

The effort is part of a joint plan with the European Union, launched in 2012 throughout the former Soviet Union, to build capacity to minimize the threats from hazardous waste to human health and the environment, as well as to strengthen legislation and build capacity in the management of pesticide containers.

For decades, pesticides have been used worldwide as a mean to increase agricultural output, fight pests and control tropical diseases. Thousands of active chemical ingredients have been in use to that aim, some of them proving to be highly efficient and therefore popular like DDT or endosulfan.

However, with increasing and prolonged use, also negative impacts became noticeable such as an increase of disease rates, infertility and sometimes death, or environmental impacts including contamination of local water supplies, global transport and bio-accumulation of persistent organic pollutants (POPs), or loss of income to farmers whose products contains unacceptable concentrations of pesticide residues to be fit for sale.

An additional problem is the build-up of large stocks of obsolete pesticides (OPs) over time, stemming from overuse and mismanagement of pesticides or because stocks became unusable due to long-term storage leading to degradation.

According to the World Bank, there is significant risk that pesticides could pollute the groundwater in parts of Belarus, affecting well water, along with rivers and other bodies of water in the entire region.

The UN agency will identify and assess the most highly contaminated sites in the country. In addition to also mobilizing resources for risk reduction, the plan also promotes alternatives to the most hazardous chemicals in use, and develops communication strategies to raise awareness among farmers and the public.

“This is an important project for FAO, where our organization has a unique experience,” said Vladimir Rakhmanin, FAO Assistant Director-General for Europe and Central Asia.