

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the BCH

A general overview of the BCH

1. What is the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH)?
2. What is the difference between the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) and the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) of the CBD?
3. What type of information is available in the BCH?
4. What are country profiles?
5. What are the "LMO", "Gene & DNA sequence" and "Organism" registries?
6. What is the meaning of the different icons used in the BCH?
7. What collections are housed in the BCH Virtual Library?

Searching information

8. How can I search the information contained in the BCH?
9. How can I search for information by Record ID number?
10. Where can I find information and formats on National Reports?

Registering information

11. Who can submit information to the BCH?
12. Who can nominate National Focal Points and how?
13. Can Governments nominate "secondary" National Focal Point for the Cartagena Protocol (CPB-NFPs)?
14. What are National Authorized Users?
15. How do I become a registered user?
16. What is record validation?
17. What are common formats?
18. How do I submit information to the BCH online?
19. What are the thesaurus and the controlled vocabulary?

20. How can I save information to work on at a later date without publishing it?

21. How do I edit or delete information that I have already published?

22. How can I practice registering information in the BCH without publishing it?

Your profile

23. How can I change my account information?

24. What do I do if I have forgotten my password?

25. How can I receive BCH updates?

26. What is the RSS feed function?

Internet limitations

27. How can I access information in the BCH if I have no Internet access or poor Internet connectivity?

28. How can I register information in the BCH if I have no Internet access or poor Internet connectivity?

National nodes

29. What is interoperability with the BCH?

30. What are Hermes and the Ajax plug-in?

A general overview of the BCH

What is the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH)?

The Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) is established in [Article 20](#) of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, in order to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms; and assist Parties to implement the Protocol.

The BCH functions like a *central information marketplace* where the providers and users of biosafety information interact and exchange that information. All interested users can freely search and retrieve information through the BCH website.

To fulfill its role, the BCH offers its users a standard set of terms, or ([controlled vocabulary](#), [common formats](#) for the submission of information and is made available in all 6 of the official UN languages for both online and off-line use:

- The online version of the BCH is available at <http://bch.cbd.int/>

- An offline copy of the BCH is available for download at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/downloads.shtml#f> and is updated quarterly.

The primary sources of guidance on the functioning and implementation of the BCH are found in the [Modalities of Operation of the BCH](#) and the [Multi-year Program of Work for the Operation of the BCH](#). A substantial collection of help documents to help you with the BCH Central Portal and the Cartagena Protocol is also available in the *BCH Online Help*, accessible through all pages of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/help/default.shtml>.

What is the difference between the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) and the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) of the CBD?

The **Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM)** of the Convention on Biological Diversity (available at <http://www.cbd.int/chm/>), was established in accordance with [Article 18\(3\)](#) of the Convention to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation on all biodiversity issues.

The **Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH)**, on the other hand, was established under [Article 20](#) of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety with a special focus on the information that must be exchanged under the Protocol.

One of the major differences between the CHM and the BCH is that, with regards to the latter, Article 20 of the Protocol enumerates a variety of categories of information which Parties to the Protocol are legally obliged to provide through the BCH. There are no such legal requirements for Parties to the Convention to make information available through the CHM.

What type of information is available in the BCH?

The information available in the BCH is comprised of the information required under [Article 20](#) of the Protocol as well as categories of information specifically requested by the Parties in their periodic meetings. At a minimum, the BCH has a role in providing access to information listed in its [Modalities of Operation](#). The information currently available is organized into *National Records* and *Reference Records* as follows:

- **National Records** (validated by BCH National Focal Points, see also Q16):
 - National Contacts: Cartagena Protocol (CPB-NFP); Contact point for unintentional transboundary movements and emergency measures (Art. 17); Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-NFP).
 - National biosafety websites or databases
 - Competent national authorities (Art. 19.2)

- Biosafety Laws, Regulations, Guidelines & Regional and International Agreements
- Country's Decisions or any other Communications
- Risk Assessments generated by a regulatory process
- Biosafety Experts
- Reports on Biosafety Expert Assignment

Note: Article 20 of the Protocol requires that this national information is made available in the BCH Central Portal maintained by the Secretariat whether or not it is made available on a national website. However, the use of either *Hermes* or the *Ajax Plug-In* ([see Q31](#)) allows those Governments wishing to register their national information only once, to mirror the information created in the BCH's Central Portal in their National BCH.

- **Reference Records** (validated by BCH National Focal Points, see also Q16):

- Contact Details
- Capacity Building Activities, Projects and Opportunities
- Biosafety Organizations
- Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC)
- Scientific Bibliographic Database on Biosafety (managed by ICGEB)
(**Note:** Click [here](#) for an explanation about the difference between the content of the BIRC and the Scientific database)
- BCH News
- Risk assessments generated by an independent or non-regulatory process
- Living Modified Organisms (LMOs)
- Genes and DNA sequences
- Organisms

In addition to the core information referred to above, the BCH also provides general information on the Cartagena Protocol, the use of the BCH and links to resources for the implementation of the Protocol.

What are country profiles?

Every BCH page provides a quick search facility to obtain country profiles. A drop down menu is provided on the right hand side of the horizontal navigation bar which allows the user to select a country and display a summary of all the records entered in the BCH by that country. The country profiles are divided into 2 sections as follows:

1. **Profile information and status** which sets out: Country, Date of signature, Date of ratification, Date of entry into force, Profile revision, Profile status and Profile last updated on.
2. **List of the type of documents registered** with hyperlinks to access those records.

The number of records for each type of document is indicated as well as the date of last update.


5. What are the "LMO", "Gene & DNA sequence" and "Organism" registries?

The **LMO Registry** provides summary information on all living modified organisms (LMOs) registered in the BCH including transformation events, genetic modifications, and the unique identification code (if available) for each record. Links to all decisions and Risk assessment reports that refer to these organisms are accessible through the registry.

The **Gene & DNA sequence Registry** provides summary information on gene inserts and characteristics of the genetic modifications of the LMOs registered in the BCH.

The **Organisms Registry** includes those organisms that have been registered with the BCH as parental, recipient or donor organisms. Each record provides further information about relevant biological characteristics, including information on taxonomic status, common name, origin, centre of origin and centre of genetic diversity. Links to relevant LMO records are provided at the bottom of each individual record.

What is the meaning of the different icons used in the BCH?

Icon	Location	Meaning
	This icon usually appears beside a country's name in BCH records	Clicking on this icon will provide the country profile for the country in question



This icon appears on many BCH pages in the right-side corner under the horizontal navigation bar

Comprehensive, context-sensitive *Help* information, developed by the UNEP-GEF Project on Biosafety, is available from individual BCH pages by clicking on this icon.



This icon appears beside certain words and phrases in BCH records

This icon indicates that the word or phrase is part of the [controlled vocabulary](#). Clicking on it will access the word or phrase in the BCH thesaurus.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates that the decision refers to an LMO for *Intentional introduction into the environment*.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates the approval of an LMO for *Direct use as food*.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates that the decision refers to an LMO for *Direct use as feed*.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates that the decision refers to an LMO for *Processing*.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates that the decision refers to an LMO for *Confined Use*.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates that the decision refers to an LMO for *Pharmaceuticals*.



This icon appears in the results of queries involving decisions on LMOs

When highlighted, this icon indicates the approval of an LMO for *Transit*.

What collections are housed in the BCH Virtual Library?

The two primary collections in the Virtual Library are:

The **Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC)**, contains only “non-conventional” or “grey” literature such as electronic catalogues of biosafety-related publications and information resources including: news services; e-mail listservers; online databases and search engines; reports and case studies; journals and newsletters; and teaching materials (manuals, toolkits and presentations). Its objective is to increase the accessibility and utilization of available biosafety information and resources by policymakers, educators, researchers, and the general public.

The **Scientific Bibliographic Database on Biosafety** provides access to a bibliographic collection of scientific studies relevant to biosafety and risk assessment of biotechnology. This searchable database is updated monthly and contains records of scientific articles (full reference + abstract) published in national and international scientific periodicals from 1990 onwards. Each record is vetted by scientists of the [International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology \(ICGEB\)](#) for its contribution to the numerous scientific debates concerning LMOs.

The library also provides access to **Research4Life** resources with its collection of academic and professional peer-reviewed online content which is made available for free or at low cost for the developing world. There are 3 programmes as follows:

1. **HINARI** which provides access to over 7000 peer-reviewed journals covering medicine, nursing and related health and social sciences.
2. **AGORA** which provides access to over 1200 international journals covering agriculture, fisheries, food, nutrition, veterinary science and related biological, environmental and social sciences in public institutions across the world.
3. **OARE** which provides access to more than 3000 scientific journals in a wide range of disciplines contributing to an understanding of the natural environment.

Searching information

How can I search the information contained in the BCH?

The information contained in the BCH can be accessed from the *Finding Information* section on the BCH's horizontal navigation bar and contains the following categories of information:

- National Contacts
- Laws and Regulations

- Country's Decisions and other Communications
- LMOs, Genes or Organisms
- Roster of Experts
- Capacity-Building
- Biosafety Information Resource Centre
- Scientific Bibliographic Database
- Organizations

Selecting one of these categories will produce a search page where records can be located through a variety of information filters. For example, the *National Contacts* category can be searched by geographical area, type of national contact, date of record and keywords.

The *Finding Information* section also contains the following categories of compiled lists of information (which are updated periodically):

- National Contacts
- LMO Registry
- Gene & DNA sequence
- Organism Registry

Please refer to the *Help section on Finding information* (at http://bch.cbd.int/help/topics/en/webframe.html?Surfing_the_BCH_Central_Port_al.html) for more details on this subject.

How can I search for information by Record ID number?

At the bottom of the left-hand menu in the *Finding Information* section there is a **Go to record ID** field. Entering the record ID number in this field and clicking the **Go** button will allow direct access to the record being searched.

Where can I find information and formats on National Reports?

The information and formats on National Reports can be accessed either in the [country profiles](#) or in the *Reporting* page of *The Protocol* section on the BCH's horizontal navigation bar. In the latter, along with the reports themselves, a **National Reports Analyzer** function is available from the *Reporting* page as well as analyses undertaken by the Secretariat of the information contained in the reports. BCH Annual Reports and Annual Reports on the Roster of Experts can also be accessed from the *Reporting* page.

Registering information

Who can submit information to the BCH?

All registered users may submit information to the BCH within the restrictions applied to their roles as follows:

- **BCH national focal points (BCH-NFPs)** may register all types of BCH records with the exception of National Focal Point records. When submitted by BCH-NFPs, *National Records* are directly published while *Reference Records* are subject to validation by the Secretariat prior to publication in the BCH.
- **National Authorized Users (NAUs)** may also register all types of BCH records with the exception of National Focal Point records. When submitted by NAU, *National Records* are subject to validation by BCH-NFP and *Reference Records* are subject to validation by the Secretariat prior to publication in the BCH.
- **General registered users** may register all types of Reference Records, subject to validation by the Secretariat prior to publication in the BCH.

Who can nominate National Focal Points and how?

The registration of National focal points in the BCH can only be done by the Secretariat **upon receipt of a written communications** addressed to the Executive Secretary and **endorsed by the following categories:**

- The designation of a **National Focal Point for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB-NFP)** must be endorsed by the *National Focal Point for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD-NFP)* or by a *direct expression of the Government* (i.e. a Minister of State).
- The designation of a **National Focal Point for the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-NFP)** must be endorsed by the *National Focal Point for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB-NFP)*.
- The **Point of contact for receiving notifications under Article 17 (Emergency Measures)** must be endorsed by the *National Focal Point for the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-NFP)*.

Note: The common format for National Focal Point nominations is available for download at <http://bch.cbd.int/Doc/CommonFormats/focalPoint.doc>


Can Governments nominate "secondary" National Focal Point for the Cartagena Protocol (CPB-NFPs)?

Under Article 19 of the Protocol, Governments are requested to designate one CPB-NFP to liaise with the Secretariat. The Secretariat can therefore register only one Focal Point per country. However, with regard to the Secretariat's communications to Governments, the Secretariat can copy its correspondence to any other person named by the Focal Point.

What are National Authorized Users?

In some instances, *National Focal Points for the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-NFPs)* may wish to delegate to *National Authorized Users (NAUs)* some or all of the responsibilities of registering information in the BCH.

NAUs can create and manage draft records in all of the BCH's categories of information (with the exception of [registering National Focal Points](#)). However, all new records created by NAUs, as well as any modifications that they make to existing records, are subject to [validation](#) either by the BCH-NFP, in the case of [National records](#), or by the Secretariat in the case of [Reference records](#) prior to publication in the BCH. An account for an NAU may be created by a BCH-NFP as follows:

1. Log onto the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>);
2. Click on **User Administration** in the left-hand menu under the *Administration* heading;
3. Click on the **Create an account** button;
4. In the *Identification* section of the *User Profile* page that appears, enter a valid email address in the **Account ID** field;
5. In the *Contact details* section, enter the person's **name**.
6. In the *Access Control* section, select the role of **National Authorized User for all records** from the *Roles* field;
7. Click on the  icon which makes the role appear in the *Selected Roles* field; and
8. Click on the **Save profile** button at the top of the *User Profile* page.

A confirmation message will appear in red font at the top of the page indicating that the registration was successful. Note that once this confirmation appears, the BCH automatically sends to the new NAU a welcome message by email which contains a password for logging onto the *Management Centre* (at

<http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>). In case of registration problems, please contact the Secretariat at bch@cbd.int.

How do I become a registered user?

A registered user account may be created as follows:

1. Click on the **Sign Up for a BCH Account** link in the top-right corner of any BCH page;
2. Complete the *General User Account form*; and
3. Click on the **Submit request** button at the bottom of the page.

Within 24 hours, an automatic welcome message containing a password will be received in order to log onto the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>) to create and manage information in the BCH. General Users may submit all BCH [Reference records](#) subject to [validation](#) by the Secretariat prior to publication in the BCH.

BCH registered users can log onto the [Training Site of the BCH](#) with their regular email address and password.

What is record validation?

BCH records, other than [National records](#) submitted by *BCH National Focal Points*, are not published directly, but require validation prior to their publication on the BCH.

When a [National record](#) is submitted to the BCH by a [National Authorized Users](#) an automatic validation notification is sent by e-mail to the BCH-NFP. When a [Reference record](#) is submitted by any user to the BCH, an automatic validation notification is sent to the Secretariat. It is then the responsibility of either the BCH-NFP or the Secretariat to ensure the *accuracy and completeness* of the record prior to validating it for publication in the BCH.

Once the record has been validated, the submitting user will receive an automatic email notification that the record has been made public. In some cases, the user may receive a request for changes prior to validation.

What are common formats?

Common formats are standard forms, made available on the BCH in MS Word format for download, to assist users to gather and organize information prior to submission. They are off-line copies of the online registration forms available though the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>).

It is preferable for BCH information to be submitted online through the *Management Centre*. However, **users with limited Internet access** may complete common formats and submit them, duly signed, to the Secretariat by email or fax (however, common formats should only be faxed if sending them by email is impossible). Please refer to the *Contact page* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/help/contact.shtml>) for contact details.

How do I submit information to the BCH online?

The *Management Center* of the BCH is the simplest, cheapest and most efficient way to register data in the BCH. It is the most commonly used option by governments and organizations. A reliable Internet connection is required and records are entered manually as follows:

1. Log on to the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>);
2. Select **Register a new record** in the left-hand menu under the *Management Centre* heading;
3. From the *Register a new record* page **select the type of record** from the list of links provided;
4. Complete all of the fields on the electronic registration forms;
5. Click on the **Review button** to double check the completeness and accuracy of the information entered
6. Click on the **Save changes** button; and
7. Click on the **Submit for publishing** button to make the record public in the BCH.

Note: Governmental agencies or organizations managing information on their own servers may wish to explore the possibility of making their servers interoperable with the BCH by exchanging data in XML format. National Focal Points or IT administrators who are interested in this option may contact the Secretariat for further information. Please refer to the *Contact page* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/help/contact.shtml>) for contact details.

What are the thesaurus and the controlled vocabulary?

Controlled vocabulary refers to the BCH's *thesaurus* of pre-defined list of terms and related synonyms used in a specific context. Controlled vocabularies are used to register and search for information in the BCH databases.

- A **broader term** indicates the more general class to which a term belongs in the controlled vocabulary; everything that is true of a term is

also true of its broader term (e.g. *Gossypium* is broader than *Gossypium hirsutum*).

- A **narrower term** indicates a more specific term or member of a class in the controlled vocabulary (e.g. *Gossypium hirsutum* is narrower than *Gossypium*).
- A **non-preferred term** is a synonym to a preferred use term in the controlled vocabulary that has an equivalent meaning to the preferred use term, but is not used for indexing records (e.g. “bananas” is a non-preferred term for “banana”).
- A **preferred use term** in the controlled vocabulary is the term selected from among synonyms to be used for indexing and retrieval purposes. This term may also be used instead of non-preferred term. This term is translated into the six UN languages to enable multi-lingual functionality of the BCH.
- A **related term** brings to the user's attention terms in the controlled vocabulary that are associated because of overlapping meanings or other relationships (e.g. taxonomic and common names for organisms).

Note: The BCH thesaurus can be searched at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/thesaurus/>.

How can I save information to work on at a later date without publishing it?

Draft records in any category may be saved for access at a later date

From the electronic registration form:

- Click on the **Save changes** button and then
- Click on the **Save as a draft** button.

A draft can be worked on at a later date as follows:

1. Log on to the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>);
 2. Click on **Edit a draft record** in the left-hand menu under the *Management Centre* heading; and
 3. Select the record to be edited and complete the registration pages.
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19. How do I edit or delete information that I have already published?

Information that is already published may be edited or deleted as follows:

1. Log onto the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>);
 2. Click on **Edit a published record** in the left-hand menu under the *Management Centre* heading; and
 3. Select the record to be edited or deleted.
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How can I practice registering information in the BCH without publishing it?

The **BCH Training Site** is a mirror copy of the official BCH and has been implemented to help BCH users familiarize themselves with the functioning of the BCH's Management Center. The information registered on the Training Site does not affect the official BCH site and the information that is registered in it is not made publicly available. BCH registered users can log onto the Training Site, at <http://bchtraining.cbd.int/>, with their regular email address and password.

Your profile

How can I change my account information?

Account information can be changed as follows:

1. Log on to the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>);
 2. Click on **My Profile** in the left-hand menu under the *Management Centre* heading;
 3. Update the fields on the *My Profile page*; and
 4. Click on the **Update my profile** button.
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What do I do if I have forgotten my password?

On the access page to the *Management Centre* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/>), click on **Forgot your password?**. You will be asked for your email address and, if you are a registered user, a new password will be sent immediately to your registered email account.

How can I receive BCH updates?

BCH account holders can subscribe to the *BCH Current Awareness Service* (at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/maillinglist.shtml>), a listserv that sends out summaries of new and updated records in the BCH, in categories selected by the user. This service is of particular interest to regulators and National Focal Points. The Secretariat may also send out periodic notifications of interest in each category.

What is the RSS feed function?

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds are web pages designed to be read by computers rather than people. To use them you need a *news reader* that is a piece of software that checks the feeds and lets you read any new information that has been added. There are many different versions of readers, some of which are accessed using a browser and some of which are downloadable applications.

BCH users may subscribe to an RSS feed at <http://bch.cbd.int/centralportal/ui/newsitem/rssnewsitems.aspx> to receive automatic updates when new news items are added to the BCH site.

Internet limitations

How can I access information in the BCH if I have no Internet access or poor Internet connectivity?

An offline version of the BCH which may be written to a blank DVD is updated quarterly and made available for download at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/downloads.shtml#f>.

National Focal Points for the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-NFPs) who have **limited Internet access** may write to the Secretariat, at bch@cbd.int, to request periodic shipment of the DVD updates. Note that up to 5 copies of the DVD can be shipped to NFPs on a quarterly, biannual or annual basis.

How can I register information in the BCH if I have no Internet access or poor Internet connectivity?

[Common formats](#) in MS Word may be downloaded, completed and submitted, duly signed, to the Secretariat for off-line registration in the BCH on behalf of the user. **Please note that this option is available only to users with no Internet access or poor Internet connectivity.**

National nodes

What is interoperability with the BCH?

Interoperability refers to the sharing of data between a country's national BCH and the BCH Central Portal maintained by the Secretariat.

Information that is registered in the BCH can automatically appear in a country's national BCH by using either [Hermes or the Ajax Plug-In](#).

Governmental agencies or organizations managing information on their own servers may also wish to explore the possibility of making their servers interoperable with the BCH by exchanging data in XML format. National Focal Points or IT administrators who are interested in this option may contact the Secretariat for further information.

What are Hermes and the Ajax plug-in?

Hermes and the Ajax Plug-In allow for information that is created in the BCH's Central Portal to appear automatically in a country's National BCH.

Hermes is an online *Content Management System* which provides the building blocks of a national BCH. It provides, in addition to out-of-the-box interoperability with the BCH, content management, content versioning, file management, search functions, support for multiple languages, security through SSL authentication and much more. Hermes based websites are hosted on the Secretariat's servers which are constantly monitored with guaranteed 99.9% uptime through redundancy.

The **BCH Ajax Plug-In** is a client side application that can be easily integrated with any existing website to provide dynamic display of information from the BCH through out-of-the-box interoperability. The BCH Ajax Plug-In does not require any specific IT knowledge, works on all server platforms and does not require any software installation.

Further information and manuals for these two solutions may be found at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/solutions/>