



The Australia Group

At a Glance

The Australia Group (AG) is a group of [42 countries](#) and the European Union [dedicated](#) to preventing the spread and proliferation of chemical and biological weapons through the coordination of export control policies. The AG facilitates compliance with the [Chemical Weapons Convention \(CWC\)](#) and the [Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention \(BWC\)](#). All AG participants are parties to the CWC and BWC.

History

In 1984, a United Nations investigation team [discovered](#) Iraq used nerve agents and sulfur mustard, both chemical weapons, in the [Iran-Iraq war](#) in violation of the Geneva Protocol and Iraq obtained some of the precursor materials for its CW program through legal commercial channels. Although several countries introduced export controls on certain chemicals in response to this discovery, the biggest weakness of these policies was the lack of uniformity and the fact that they were often being evaded.

In response, Australia facilitated a meeting in June 1985 in Brussels with countries with existing export controls in hopes of reaching uniform national licensing measures and to strengthen cooperation. Fifteen participating countries and the European Commission came to agreement that it would be worthwhile to understand how to make current export controls more effective in preventing the spread of chemical and biological weapons (CBW).

Overview

AG members [utilize](#) effective export control practices to prevent exports from being used to spread CBW. Participants meet annually to discuss export control policy recommendations and areas for improvement. Members evaluate export licensing programs to identify better ways to prevent the proliferation of CBW programs. Points of improvement can include the facilitation of exchanging information, standardization of national measures, and the potential implementation of additional measures.

Participation is voluntary and countries each use their own volition when implementing export controls. The AG [maintains](#) common control lists that participants are expected to uphold as a starting point for export control limitations. These lists contain sensitive items that participants are expected to deny requests for when there are CWB program concerns. The items on the list can be divided into five categories: chemical weapons precursors; dual-use chemical manufacturing facilities and equipment and related technology and software; dual-use biological equipment and related technology and software; human and animal pathogens and toxins; and plant pathogens.

In addition to AG participation, the AG has the option for countries to be [AG adherents](#). As an adherent, the country notifies the AG chair of their choice to adhere to AG Guidelines and Common Control Lists and to use them as a benchmark for best practices of export controls. Adherence is unilateral and not subject to acceptance by the AG. Kazakhstan has been an adherent since 2015 and is the only current adherent. China, Russia, North Korea, Iran and Brazil are neither participants nor adherents.

The AG and National Security

Although licensing practices promoted by the AG are not substitutes for observance of the Geneva Protocol, the BWC, or the CWC, the AG is a tool that facilitates observance and adherence to these international standards as well as information exchanges. International chemical and biotechnology industries are a target for proliferators to obtain precursors for CBW programs.