



**EEB/Ban Hg WG¹ call on the European Parliament
to push for a stronger Community Strategy on Mercury
(Plenary vote on 14/03/06)**

Brussels, 10 March 2006

The European Environmental Bureau / Ban Mercury Working Group welcome the report submitted by the rapporteur Mr. Matsakis. The groups further applaud the Environment Committee for taking the EU mercury strategy a step further by calling for an earlier and wider EU mercury export ban. The report not only underlines and supports the proposed Community strategy on mercury, but goes further on several aspects.

It is now important that the Plenary of the European Parliament takes its part of the responsibility and sends a clear message to the European and World community about the steps towards minimising supply and demand of mercury.

1. The proposed ban on exports of EU mercury should be implemented as soon as possible, preferably by 2008:

- The EU is the world's largest mercury exporter, and most of this mercury goes to the developing world where it is often haphazardly used and released, contaminating local communities and global food supplies, including fish consumed in Europe;
- The argument that new production of mercury might be triggered to fill in any gap in market demand, after an EU export ban, lacks merit, since it ignores the limited ability, for both technical and political reasons, of the few remaining mercury-producing countries to expand their output and further ignores a range of EU initiatives proposed to help curb mercury demand.
- Environment Ministers considered that the EU export of mercury should be phased out as soon as possible and this date was originally proposed in earlier Commission drafts but also by the Luxembourg Presidency;

We would therefore urge you to SUPPORT amendments 6, 13 (if 6 falls) as well as 7

2. The mercury-cell process used in the chlor-alkali industry should be phased out as soon as possible and completely by 2010::

- The PARCOM Decision 90/3, states that measures should be taken to ensure that all mercury-cell chlor-alkali industries have converted to mercury-free technologies by 2010 at the latest.
- The mercury-cell process is NOT considered a Best Available Technique under the IPPC Directive – IPPC BREF published in 2000.
- Adequate alternatives - membrane and asbestos-free diaphragm methods – are used since the early 1990s.
- The cost of converting European mercury-cell plants to mercury-free processes would be far outweighed by the health benefits to the EU public².

We would urge you to REJECT amendment 1.

We would further urge you to SUPPORT amendments 8, 9, 3 and 4.

¹ The **European Environmental Bureau, (EEB)**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 145 environmental citizens' organisations from some 32 countries based in all EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. These organisations range from local and national, to European and international. The aim of the EEB is to protect and improve the environment of Europe and to enable the citizens of Europe to play their part in achieving that goal.

The **Ban Mercury Working Group**, www.ban.org/Ban-Hg-Wg/, is an international coalition of 28 public interest non-governmental organisations from around the world formed initially in 2002 by 2 US based NGOs, the Basel Action Network (www.ban.org) and the Mercury Policy Project (www.Mercurypolicy.org), working to end pollution from the toxic metal -- Mercury.

² *Rice and Trasande, 2005*

3. Restriction of the use of mercury in dental amalgams should be evaluated and pursued.

- Viable mercury-free alternatives already exist; in some member states, over 90% of all dental filling placements are with non-mercury fillings;³
- Analysis for restriction has already been conducted in Norway, Sweden and Denmark⁴; dental amalgam has been replaced almost totally by other materials during the last six to seven years in Sweden.⁵
- From a public health perspective it makes sense to apply a precautionary approach considering that alternatives exist.⁶
- Dental amalgam waste cause water and sludge contamination when discharged from dental clinics, and air pollution from crematoria.
- Amalgam fillings are de facto more expensive than most, possibly all, other fillings when including environmental costs.⁷

We would therefore urge you to SUPPORT amendments 10 and 5

4. Restrictions should be put in place on the marketing and use of mercury in all measuring and control equipment for consumer and professional use, only allowing time limited exemptions where adequate alternatives are not yet available:

- These devices pose a risk to human health and the environment during usage because they are easily broken, and after usage because they end up in the waste stream and ultimately release mercury into the environment.
- Substituting mercury in these product categories is the only effective way of addressing inevitable emissions from their use and haphazard disposal.
- For both consumer and professional uses, many of these devices have already been extensively analysed; non-mercury alternatives are commercially available; and costs are comparable;
- Barometers use large quantities of mercury (around 1 kg - whereas a fever thermometer around 1gr) and may cause contamination and health effects if broken.

Responsible committees under the EC, such as the Medical Devices Expert Group, which deal with respective product directives which involve environmental impacts, should be accessible to all stakeholders and with balanced participation, also involving the appropriate researchers and scientists.

We would therefore urge you to REJECT amendment 2 and to SUPPORT amendment 12.

Full voting list is attached.

For further details please consider the new publication of the environmental and health NGOs
“Zero Mercury –Key issues and policy recommendations for the EU Strategy on Mercury”

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³ Swedish KEMI Report 4/04, Mercury - Investigation for a general ban, page 32.

Also, an article "Exit amalgam? Use of amalgam in dental practice in Norway 2002" recently published in the Journal of the Norwegian Dental Association (Den norske TannlegeforeningsTidende 2004; 114 no. 6, p 284-286)

http://www.tannlegetidende.no/pls/dntt/pa_dtdm.xpnd?vp_seks_id=97290&b_start=1

⁴ KEMI - Swedish Chemical Inspectorate. Mercury – Investigation of a general ban
http://www.kemi.se/upload/Trycksaker/Pdf/Rapporter/Rapport4_04.pdf accessed 13 June 2005, p. 32

⁵ KEMI – Swedish Chemical Inspectorate, Nr.9/05 Mercury-free Dental Fillings; Phase out of amalgam in Sweden, December 2005.

⁶ KEMI - Swedish Chemical Inspectorate. Mercury – Investigation of a general ban

http://www.kemi.se/upload/Trycksaker/Pdf/Rapporter/Rapport4_04.pdf accessed 13 June 2005, p. 8

⁷ Hylander, L. D. & Goodsite, M. E. 2005. Environmental costs of mercury pollution. *Sci. Total Environ.*, Table 2, p. In press.