

For Immediate Release
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Energy Dept. Considers Sale of Mercury Stockpile; Sen. Obama, Health Advocates Instead Recommend Domestic Storage of Dangerous Neurotoxin

Washington, DC—The U.S. Department of Energy is being urged to store rather than sell its 1300+ metric tons of surplus mercury on the world market.

In a recent letter to DOE Secretary Samuel Bodman, U.S. Senator Barack Obama (D-Ill.) “...strongly urged the Department of Energy to ensure that mercury stockpiles remain within the possession of the U.S. government.”

The senator was joined by the Zero Mercury Working Group and Natural Resources Defense Council in warning that U.S. mercury exports could wreak havoc in developing countries and then “boomerang” back to the U.S.

“We've got to stop the cycle of toxic trade in mercury which winds up polluting the fish we eat,” said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project and cofounder of the Zero Mercury Working Group, a coalition of 48 public interest NGOs working worldwide to reduce mercury uses, releases and exposures, and store surplus mercury.

“There is no question that mercury from this sale would find its way up the food chain, onto our plates, and into our bodies,” said Dr. Linda Greer, an environmental toxicologist and director of NRDC’s Environmental Health Program. “Inviting less developed countries to a close-out sale on surplus American poison is sheer lunacy given what we know about how easily mercury moves around the globe.”

Advocates suggest that DOE follow the lead of the Defense Department which due to global environmental concerns decided to store rather than sell over 4,000 tons of its surplus mercury. They also support Senator Obama’s legislation to ban mercury exports.

Sales of surplus mercury by DOE would place the U.S. Government at odds with states, said Bender. A March 2006 Environmental Council of States resolution states that “ECOS remains strongly opposed to U.S. mercury stockpile sales and recognizes that long-term storage of mercury is a federal responsibility.”

“Given its prior support in 2005 for a new, soon-to-be-released UNEP mercury trade report, any U.S. Government sales now could be viewed as hypocritical,” said Bender. “Instead, like recently proposed in the EU, the U.S. should ban mercury exports, both to reduce global pollution and exposure to millions of gold miners in developing countries.”

The DOE mercury stockpile is more than eight times the amount exported in 2004 by the U.S. Once used in weapons and other energy-related technologies, the mercury is now obsolete. Currently, most of DOE’s mercury is stored at the Y-12 National Nuclear Security Administration in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Exposure to mercury can lead to neurological diseases and such developmental problems as learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders and mental retardation. Elevated mercury levels in adults can adversely affect fertility, blood pressure, and may contribute to heart-rate variability and heart disease.

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For more information:

<http://www.mercurypolicy.org>

<http://www.zeromercury.org>

<http://www.nrdc.org>

See also <http://releases.usnewswire.com/printing.asp?id=76725>