



ENVIRONMENTAL and HEALTH NGOs¹ KEY DEMANDS on the proposed amendment to the Limitations Directive, restricting the use and marketing of certain MEASUREMENT AND CONTROL EQUIPMENT CONTAINING MERCURY (Rapporteur ENVI Mrs. SORNOSA)

12 July 2006

The environmental and health NGOs call upon the Members of the Environment (ENVI) and the Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committees to support the following key demands, in the exchange of views on 13 July 2006 at the ENVI Committee meeting.

- 1. Restrictions should be put in place on the marketing and use of mercury in all measuring and control equipment for consumer and professional use (especially households, healthcare facilities and schools), only allowing time-limited exemptions where safer alternatives are not yet available.** The use and marketing of new mercury-containing fever thermometers and sphygmomanometers (excepting strain gauges for healthcare), for both consumer and professional use, shall be banned and not qualify for exemptions. Manometers, barometers, and other thermometers etc. containing mercury for the general public should be banned and not qualify for exemptions. For any other measuring and control equipment not intended for sale to the general public, a transitional period of 2 years should be instituted before the ban comes into force. Derogations may be given for a limited period of time, to be set on a case-by-case basis, if manufacturers can prove that they have undertaken every effort to develop safer alternative equipment, and these are still not available.

Justification:

- Alternatives are available and Scandinavian countries readily use them. Specifically with medical equipment, no risks were observed to patients from the use of mercury-free alternatives.
- All devices which use mercury pose a risk to human health and the environment during use, through breakage and after disposal, because they can release mercury into the environment.
- Substituting mercury in these product categories is the only effective way of addressing inevitable release of mercury.
- 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.

- 2. Sphygmomanometers (excepting strain gauges in healthcare) containing mercury for both public and healthcare uses should not be permitted. Exemptions are unnecessary, as many suitable alternatives exist.**

Justification:

- Sphygmomanometers are used widely in hospitals, in private medical practices, etc. Of all mercury instrumentation used in health care, sphygmomanometers represent the largest mass of mercury per device (approximately 100 g/unit).
- Their widespread use collectively makes them one of the largest mercury reservoirs in the health care setting.

- Mercury-free sphygmomanometers can greatly reduce the risk of mercury exposure to patients, staff, and leakage into the environment. Mercury-free sphygmomanometers, when properly calibrated, are as accurate if not more so than the older mercury models.
- Mercury-free blood sphygmomanometers do not cause problems in clinical diagnosis and monitoring, including in the presence of arrhythmias, preeclampsia and in accelerated (malign) hypertension.ⁱⁱ In Sweden, Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands, only positive experiences have been reported from the use of the mercury-free devices.
- There are many mercury-free sphygmomanometers on the European market from major medical equipment suppliers, (9 brands identified to date), and many of them satisfy the criteria of professional organisations such as the British Hypertension Society, the European Hypertension Society, Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation.
- The Commission avoided conducting a proper risk analysis of mercury free sphygmomanometers.

3. New barometers containing mercury should not be put in the market.

- Barometers use large quantities of mercury (around 1000 g. - whereas a fever thermometer around 1g.). Any time a barometer breaks, it poses an enormous risk of contamination and severe health effects.
- Clean up costs following breakage can be significant.
- The maintenance of existing barometers for historical collection, museums and heritage purposes is understandable, but manufacturing NEW barometers following traditional designs which contain mercury is irresponsible. Carefully controlled and licensed manufacturing of these kinds of instruments does NOT guarantee that these instruments pose no danger during the entire lifetime of the instrument, particularly through breakage.

ⁱ Environmental NGOS include

The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens' organisations 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 **Zero Mercury Working group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of more than 40 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed initially in 2004 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project/Ban Mercury Working Group. The aim of the group is to reach "Zero" emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, towards eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally."

European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN), <http://www.env-health.org/> is an international non-governmental organisation advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well-being. Member groups and organisations represent health, environment, women, health professionals and others. The group has a diverse membership of more than 50 member groups including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, academic institutions and other not-for-profit organisations.

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH), www.noharm.org, is an international coalition of environmental health groups and health care professionals whose goal is to make health care ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health, without compromising patient safety or care.

ⁱⁱ KEMI – Swedish Chemical Inspectorate (2005b) Mercury-free blood pressure measurement equipment – Experiences in the Swedish healthcare sector. Sundbyberg. November 2005, p. 4.