



**Health and Environmental NGOs' call for a wider Restriction of certain mercury containing measuring and control equipment directive
Environment Committee vote (13/09/06) on the Sornosa Report**

Brussels, 12 September 2006

Health and environment NGOs call upon the Members of the Environment Committee to consider our comments in your vote on the Draft report on Measuring Devices containing mercury on 13 September.

While the health and environment NGOs applaud the proposal to extend the Commission's restrictions to the sale of new mercury-containing fever thermometers (for both private and healthcare use) and other such devices for public use, another important category of mercury containing instruments has not been included in the restriction. **Sphygmomanometers** (blood pressure measurement devices) **in healthcare** should be included in the scope of the directive to achieve the envisaged health and environmental objectives. The reasons for restricting mercury sphygmomanometers also for professional/healthcare use are indisputable, and would be clear to all if the Commission had not avoided conducting a proper risk analysis of mercury-free sphygmomanometers.

Mercury-containing sphygmomanometers (not including the specific sub-group of strain gauges) should not be permitted for either public or healthcare uses, 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 health care.
- 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 sphygmomanometers do not cause problems in clinical diagnosis and monitoring, including for arrhythmias, pre-eclampsia and in accelerated (malign) hypertension.* 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, and the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation.

We would therefore urge you to SUPPORT amendments 10, 11, 13, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9.

Furthermore, the proposed ban on the sale of new manometers, barometers and non-fever thermometers to the general public should be extended. **All other measuring and control equipment for both consumer and professional use** (especially private households, healthcare facilities and schools) for which safer alternatives already exist, should be banned, with time-limited exceptions in the absence of such alternatives. The Commission asserts in the Mercury Strategy that professional use of mercury

instruments pose less of a danger because of the proper disposal procedures and hazardous waste regulations governing such use. However, this is an incorrect assumption.

Manometers, barometers, and other thermometers, AND any other measuring and control equipment NOT intended for sale to the general public should be banned, with a transition period of 3 years prior to entry into force. Exemptions should be accorded for a limited time, on a case-by-case basis, if manufacturers can prove that despite efforts to develop safer alternatives, 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.
- Experience from a new EU member state (Czech Republic) shows that mercury-containing measuring devices in hospitals are neither properly segregated for disposal, nor is the mercury recycled. In the best case scenario, these devices are disposed of in medical waste containers which are then incinerated. The incineration filters containing mercury-laden ash are then placed in hazardous waste landfills, or used as road filling, or discharged in closed mines. These disposal methods do not ensure that mercury stays out of the environment.

**We would therefore urge you to SUPPORT amendments 14, 15 , 1 or 7 (Part A).
Further more we would urge you to SUPPORT amendments 2 or 8**

Finally, a restriction against new mercury barometers being placed in the European market is necessary.

New barometers containing mercury, irrespective of their size, should not be put in the market.

Justification:

- Barometers use large quantities of mercury (around 1000 g. compared to around 1 g. for a fever thermometer). 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.
- Many US states have adopted mercury-containing product bans and no exemptions have been requested for newly manufactured barometers of any size.[†]

We would therefore urge you to REJECT amendment 1 or 7 part B and am. 12 part B.

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

[†] <http://www.newmoa.org/prevention/mercury/imerc/phaseoutinfo.cfm>