



**ENVIRONMENTAL and HEALTH NGOs <sup>1</sup> CALL FOR A STRONG DIRECTIVE – BALANCING  
CONTENT AND TIMETABLE - on  
MEASUREMENT & CONTROL EQUIPMENT CONTAINING MERCURY**

**7 May 2007**

To the Members of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament

The Health & Environment NGOs **call upon you to support the compromised Council Common Position, as a minimum and pragmatic approach** for the reasons outlined below. Mercury is an extremely dangerous toxin that is already widespread in our environment, posing a serious danger to the health of current and future generations. The health hazard comes from the entire lifecycle of all mercury uses, so all measures that reduce mercury use and spillage into our environment **as soon as possible** are important..

We call on you to consider the following likely scenarios:

1. If the **Council Common Position is accepted** fully at the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of the Environment Committee, and subsequently also in the Plenary, the changes would then be swiftly published in the Official Journal of the EU by late summer 2007. As a result, all thermometers and other measuring devices for consumers will have to be mercury-free by the beginning of 2009 (eighteen months after entry into force). In the meantime the Commission should work on its report on the alternatives to mercury containing measuring devices for the professional sector; and mercury barometers will be banned by summer 2009.

This could be acceptable given the quantities of mercury used in measuring devices which will be halted with such an approach, vis-à-vis the swift timetable for implementation.

2. If **Council Common Position is not supported**, the best solution given the quantities of mercury involved and the timing of implementation, would be a **strong second reading agreement under the following conditions:**
  - (a.) Stronger measures are taken for ALL measuring devices (for sphygmomanometers at a minimum) not intended for consumer use. An example would be direct prohibition from the market in 2-3 years time, with possible time-limited exemptions for manufacturers for essential uses, decided on a case by case basis, if manufacturers can prove that they have undertaken every effort to develop safer alternatives or alternative processes and which are still not available.
  - (b.) The exemption of barometers from the ban does not extend for more than a couple of extra years, if really necessary.

In such a scenario – second reading agreement – the entry in the Official Journal could be published in autumn 2007, and measures could be in place as early as spring 2009 for the already agreed scope of restriction. No time will be lost with a Commission report and direct restriction for the professional measuring devices will take place 2-3 years after adoption of the directive; two more years will be given to barometer manufacturers to adjust to the mercury free market.

3. If none of the two above scenarios is followed, and if the **2<sup>nd</sup> reading in Plenary follows the 1<sup>st</sup> reading outcome** – with absolute majority - **Conciliation and 3<sup>rd</sup> reading agreement in Parliament and Council** will have to follow. Given the procedural timetables, the directive would only be published in spring 2008, with measures occurring at the earliest in late autumn 2009. This would mean almost a full year's delay from scenario 1, during which thousands of thermometers and other mercury-containing measuring devices for consumers will be put on the

EU market raising the environmental and health risks for exposure. Furthermore it is highly questionable if the scope of restriction will improve in conciliation, and it is possible that gains in the conditions set above would be compromised by the delay in implementation.

Such a scenario COULD NOT therefore be welcomed by the NGOs.

On the basis of the above, the environmental and health NGOs therefore call on you to consider supporting the Council Common Position, which we believe will best correspond with our key demands under the existing conditions:

**1. Manufacturing new barometers which contain mercury is irresponsible.**

- ***Although very few manufacturers exist in Europe, the manufacture, repair and restoration of mercury barometers is NOT their only business. These companies usually also manufacture different types of aneroid (mercury-free) barometers, different clocks, barographs, marine instruments, thermometers, hygrometers, etc.<sup>ii</sup> Therefore their business is NOT likely to collapse when mercury use is banned.***
- The maintenance of existing barometers for historical collections, museums and heritage purposes is understandable, but manufacturing NEW barometers which contain mercury following traditional designs is irresponsible. Carefully controlled and licensed manufacturing does NOT guarantee that these instruments will never leak or break after they leave the manufacturers' floor.
- Barometers use large quantities of mercury (around 999 g more than a fever thermometer). Any barometer breakage poses an enormous risk of contamination and severe health effects, not to mention significant clean up costs<sup>iii</sup>.
- Mercury free barometers, both aneroid and digital, are already available in the market, and can be transported without the need for hazardous packaging. (see Annex)
- Furthermore, a ban on new mercury barometers will increase the value of the existing ones, and the related income for those selling and maintaining them.

**2. Mercury containing sphygmomanometers for both public and healthcare uses should not be permitted because many suitable alternatives already exist.**

- **Mercury-free sphygmomanometers do not cause problems in clinical diagnosis and monitoring of difficult cases, including arrhythmias, preeclampsia and accelerated hypertension.<sup>iv</sup> In Sweden, Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands, only positive experiences from the use of mercury-free devices have been reported. There are many mercury-free sphygmomanometers on the European market from major medical equipment suppliers, (9 brands identified to date). 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.**
- Sphygmomanometers are used widely in hospitals, in private medical practices, etc. Of all mercury instrumentation used in health care, sphygmomanometers represent one of the largest mass of mercury per device (approximately 100 g/unit), posing a commensurate risk.
- Their widespread use collectively makes them one of the largest mercury reservoirs in the health care setting, and therefore a significant danger.
- Mercury-free sphygmomanometers can greatly reduce the risk of mercury exposure to patients, staff, and the environment. When properly calibrated, they are as accurate - if not more so - than the older mercury models.

The World Health Organisation has concluded that there is ***no safe level of mercury exposure***. We need to address all sources in order to safeguard people's health.

**For more information please contact :-**

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**Annex:**

Different types of barometers<sup>v</sup>



Mercury barometer  
Open face mahogany  
stick barometer  
(910mm (36") x 120mm (5"))



**Mercury-free barometer**  
200mm (8") diameter dial barometer  
(300mm (12") overall diameter)



**Mercury-free barometer**  
Hanging Precision Aneroid Barometer  
(130mm (6") diameter)



Barometer silver  
electronic<sup>vi</sup>



**Mercury-free Barometer**  
200mm (8") dial banjo barometer  
with aneroid movement and inlays  
(960mm (38") x 250mm (10"))

<sup>i</sup>Environmental NGOS include

The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**, [www.eeb.org](http://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.

**Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)**, <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 41 member groups (6 international organisations, 11 European networks and 24 national/local organizations) 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](http://www.noharm.org), is an international coalition of hospitals and health care systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, environmental and religious organisations. HCWH is dedicated to transforming the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment.

The **Zero Mercury Working Group**, [www.zeromercury.org](http://www.zeromercury.org), is an international coalition of more than 40 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 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."

And with the support of NGOs from the USA (Natural Resources Defence Council), India (Toxics Link), China (Global Village of Beijing), Brazil (Association for Combats against the POPS), groundWork (South Africa)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.barometerworld.co.uk/default.htm> (UK), <http://www.comitti.com/> (UK), <http://www.russell-scientific.co.uk/> (UK),

<http://www.barometers.com/index.htm> (Belgium), <http://www.rosebarometers.nl>

<sup>iii</sup> As an example more than 10.000 US Dollars were needed for the clean up when a thermometer broke in a school <http://www.rep-am.com/story.php?id=20576> . Costs are a lot higher when quantities and exposure increases. See also

[http://www.zeromercury.org/library/Press\\_spills.htm](http://www.zeromercury.org/library/Press_spills.htm)

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

<sup>v</sup> All pictures of mercury and aneroid barometers are from <http://www.russell-scientific.co.uk/>

<sup>vi</sup> Picture from <http://www.barometers.com/products1.php?product=electronic>