



## PRESS RELEASE

### Time to end use of mercury-based blood pressure devices

**[BRUSSELS, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009]** - European environmental and health organisations today reaffirm their demand for the rapid phase-out of mercury-based blood pressure devices used in clinical settings, and ask the EU act on the findings in a recently published European Commission report. These groups have been campaigning for many years to end the use of dangerous mercury substances in hospitals and other settings.

The report, released by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Consumers, confirms that mercury sphygmomanometers are not necessary in healthcare, routine clinical practice or special cases. The report also finds that mercury-based sphygmomanometers are "not essential" for calibration. Therefore, due to the acute toxic hazard to healthcare workers and chronic hazard to society, these devices have no place in clinical care.

*"These findings are a significant step forward", said Anja Leetz, Executive Director of Health Care Without Harm Europe, "based on this report, the EU should move immediately to mandate the replacement of mercury-based blood pressure devices used for clinical purposes across Europe."*

The report clarified that mercury devices will be required only for validation purposes since all protocols are mercury-based, for the time being. These too should be phased out as soon as alternative standards can be validated.

*"With the world's governments poised to negotiate a global treaty to phase-out mercury, the EU can show global leadership by mandating the substitution of mercury sphygmomanometers with safe, accurate alternatives,"* said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo of the European Environmental Bureau.

The groups are now calling on the EU to assist in the development of a new validation protocol based on mercury free blood pressure gauges.

The report can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_risk/committees/04\\_scenihr/docs/scenihr\\_o025.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/docs/scenihr_o025.pdf)

**About Mercury:** Mercury is a potent neurotoxin, a global priority pollutant and a PBT – a persistent bioaccumulative and toxic chemical. Mercury is a neurotoxin, meaning that it damages the central nervous system. Exposure to it can adversely affect the brain, spinal cord, kidneys and liver. Mercury easily crosses the placenta, passing from mother to unborn child, where it can impair neurological development of the foetus.

**About Mercury in Health Care:** The breakage of mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices exposes patients and health care workers to environmental hazards, while also contributing to the global burden of mercury. The EU and several non-EU countries have already banned mercury thermometers. Several EU countries as well as more than a dozens states in the U.S. have also already successfully phase-out mercury blood pressure devices. The World Health Organization and HCWH are leading a global initiative to phase-out of mercury-based medical devices globally by 2017.

**For further information please contact:**

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