

ZMWG statement on ASGM - 14-01-13

Artisanal and small scale gold mining is the largest intentional use of mercury in the world, and dramatically reducing mercury use in this sector is a centerpiece of the mercury treaty. While much progress has been made on treaty language for ASGM, controlling the trade of mercury for use in ASGM is still under discussion.

We can't make real progress on reducing mercury use in ASGM without including trade in the picture. While governments will need to work actively to reduce demand for mercury in ASGM, it will not be feasible for governments to intervene directly with all miners, especially in developing or least developed countries with hundreds of thousands of miners scattered in many remote areas. That is why a market signal will still be needed. Restricting supply (through restricting trade) will increase the local price of mercury and make it less available overall, which will create an incentive for miners to change practices.

We recognize that the transition to a mercury-free ASGM sector will not happen overnight. But during this transition period, mercury imports cannot be unlimited, because this could create the potential for ASGM countries to become mercury "dumping grounds." The amount of mercury imported in the near-term must reflect the declining demand for mercury as the National Action Plans are implemented. Finally, the treaty must provide clear direction to all involved that mercury trade nor its use for ASGM will not continue indefinitely, and thus mercury free alternatives must be employed soon.