



PRESS RELEASE

European Parliament's Environment Committee calls for earlier and wider EU mercury export ban!

[Brussels 22/2/2006] - - - Environment and health groupsⁱ applauded today the Environment Committee's resolution on the Community Strategy Concerning Mercury.

"The Environment Committee took the Commission's strategy a step further, asking for the EU to come forward with an export ban by 2010, one year earlier than proposed in the EU Strategy Concerning Mercury last year, and strengthening several other key actions of the Strategy", said Elena Lymberidi, Zero Mercury Campaign Project Coordinator at the European Environmental Bureau. *"We commend the Committee for asking that mercury compounds are also included in the export ban".*

Further key points welcomed by NGOs include considering prohibition of exports of mercury-containing products; inclusion of trade tracking measures; phase-out of the mercury-cell chlor-alkali plants by 2010; and safe, continuously monitored storage of surplus mercury.

"We are delighted that the Parliament recognises just how urgent it is to eliminate mercury use as soon as possible in order to protect people's health today and in the future, particularly those that are most vulnerable to even very low levels of exposure such as children and pregnant women", said Genon Jensen, Executive Director of European Public Health Alliance Environment Network. *"This issue is a Europe-wide public health concern, and the Parliament has taken this seriously by requesting more information on people's actual exposure and recommending greater financial support for best practice in risk communication aimed at vulnerable groups".*

Consistent with the export ban, the Committee confirmed the importance of the EU supporting and promoting international action and cooperating with mercury mining countries and other regions at global level in view of reaching an agreement for a global legislative instrument on mercury. *"We congratulate the Committee for their proposals",* said Michael Bender of the Ban Mercury Working Group. *"We now challenge the Commission and EU governments to realise such requests – in preparation for the negotiations at the UNEP Governing Council in February 2007, where the possibility of a legally binding instrument and other global mercury strategies will be discussed".*

The NGOs further welcome the Committee's opinion that the strategy should be followed by legislative acts, such as the introduction of emission limit values for mercury from all relevant activities and all-scale coal combustion processes – as well as national mass emission limits, measures on emissions from crematoria, and measures ensuring that all mercury-containing products are separately collected and safely treated when they become waste.

However, the NGOs regret that the Committee did not agree on the restriction of use of dental amalgams, considering that viable mercury-free alternatives exist. In some Member States, over 90% of all dental filling placements are with non-mercury fillings.ⁱⁱ *"From a public health perspective it makes sense to apply a precautionary approach, considering that alternatives do exist"ⁱⁱⁱ*, said Lisette van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor for Health Care Without Harm. *"Dental amalgam waste causes water and sludge contamination when discharged from dental clinics plus air pollution from crematoria – and are de facto more expensive than most, possibly all, other fillings when including environmental costs".^{iv}*

As a further step, the environment and health NGOs now call upon the Plenary of the European Parliament to follow the Environment Committee's opinion on the EU Strategy Concerning Mercury.

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ⁱ Environmental and Health NGOS include

The **European Environmental Bureau, (EEB)**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of over 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 **Ban Mercury Working Group**, www.ban.org/Ban-Hg-Wg/, is an international coalition of 27 public interest non-governmental organisations from around the world formed initially in 2002 by 2 US based NGOs, the Basel Action Network (www.ban.org) and the Mercury Policy Project (www.Mercurypolicy.org). working to end pollution from the toxic metal -- Mercury.

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, 29 members with 5 international organisations, 10 European networks and 14 national/local organisations, including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors and nurses, academic institutions and other not-for-profit organisations.

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH), www.noharm.org, is an international coalition of hospitals and health care systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, and environmental and environmental health 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.

And with the support of NGOs from the US (NRDC), India (Toxics Link), China (Global Village of Beijing), Brazil (Association for Combats against the POPS), South Africa (groundWork)

ⁱⁱ Swedish KEMI Report 4/04, Mercury - Investigation for a general ban, page 32.

Also, an article "Exit amalgam? Use of amalgam in dental practice in Norway 2002" recently published in the Journal of the Norwegian Dental Association (Den norske TannlegeforeningsTidende 2004; 114 no. 6, p 284-286)

http://www.tannlegetidende.no/pls/dntt/pa_dtdm.xpnd?vp_seks_id=97290&b_start=1

ⁱⁱⁱ KEMI - Swedish Chemical Inspectorate. Mercury – Investigation of a general ban

http://www.kemi.se/upload/Trycksaker/Pdf/Rapporter/Rapport4_04.pdf accessed 13 June 2005, p. 8

^{iv} Hylander, L. D. & Goodsite, M. E. 2005. Environmental costs of mercury pollution. *Sci. Total Environ.*, Table 2, p. *In press.*