



PRESS RELEASE

Heading closer to a robust EU mercury export ban

(Brussels, 3 May 2007) - Environmental and health NGOs^[1] welcomed the results of the 1st reading vote from the Environment and Public Health Committee of the European Parliament on the proposed regulation to ban EU mercury exports and ensure the safe storage of surplus mercury. The Committee made a number of improvements to the original Commission proposal. “The proposals from the parliamentarian responsible for the file to really strengthen the regulation got a significant degree of support”, said Elena Lymberidi, the EEB’s Project Coordinator of the Zero Mercury Campaign. “The Committee gave a clear signal that the scope of the export ban should be opened up to include certain mercury compounds, as well as those mercury-containing products which are prohibited for sale in the EU.”

The NGOs believe that this sends a clear message to the European Commission and Council that wider measures should be adopted to close all loopholes.

“Europe has a chance to stop the export of mercury containing products to developing countries, products which are or will be prohibited from sale in the EU. Ending the double standards on mercury in this way would strongly demonstrate to the rest of the world that we Europeans take seriously our commitment to phase out mercury use globally”, said Lisette van Vliet of Health Care Without Harm Europe. The Committee also clarified that protection of EU citizens must be further ensured by a ban on the imports of metallic mercury.

The Environment and Public Health committee correctly draws attention to the fact that with current knowledge and technology, we cannot yet safely permanently dispose of mercury. Therefore, storage of metallic mercury can only be temporary until a safe permanent solution is found. Following the polluters’ pays principle, the Committee proposed that a fund should be set up to ensure financial resources from relevant industries are in place for this process.

The NGOs also welcome the Committee’s position that exchange of information must take place between all stakeholders. Member States must regularly provide information on the movement of mercury and the chlor-alkali and other concerned industries must also provide relevant details. “Starting to collect such information as soon as possible is important because then we know much more about how much mercury we are dealing with and where it is going,” said Elena Lymberidi, EEB.

“We are happy to see that the Committee believes that technical and financial assistance should be given to developing countries and NGOs for better protection and measures to eliminate mercury uses and emissions” said Ravi Agarwal, Toxics Link, India.

However, despite encouraging progress towards a mercury export ban, NGOs would like to have seen a closer implementation date than the 1 December 2010, which poses a greater risk of mercury contamination worldwide. They also regret that not all mercury compounds were included in the ban, contrary to the 2006 European Parliament’s resolution on the issue.

The environment and health NGOs therefore call on the European Parliament and Council to confirm a wide scope and swift implementation of the export ban, and ensure safe temporary storage of the surplus mercury.

Note for the editors:

Mercury is a global pollutant traveling long distances around the globe. Its most toxic form – methylmercury - accumulates in large predatory fish and is therefore transferred to our bodies through the fish diet, affecting the most vulnerable people – pregnant women and children.

For further information:-

See letter sent to Environment Committee of the European Parliament:

http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070426NGOS_1stReadingENVI_Hg_Export_ban.pdf

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^{i[i]} Environmental NGOS include

The **European Environmental Bureau, (EEB)**, 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.

The **Zero Mercury Working group**, 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."

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, 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.

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).