



Press Release

Trouble in store. EU must safely manage excess mercury

(Brussels, 12 June, 2007) – June is a key month in the campaign to protect the world from the scourge of highly toxic mercury. Anti-mercury campaigners throughout Europe urged EU decision-makers to ensure excess mercury is held in secure, constantly monitored sites. On 13 June, the EU countries' Permanent Representatives will discuss the proposal in preparation for a possible agreement at the Environment Council on 28 June, and the European Commission will present its opinion on amendments proposed by the European Parliament's Environment Committee, before Parliament votes on the issue on 19-20 June.

"The Environment Ministers' Council, the Commission and Parliament must get in step with Parliament's Environment Committee", said Elena Lymberidi of EEB's Zero Mercury campaign. "All three institutions must agree soon on requiring the safe and constantly-monitored temporary storage of surplus mercury stocks. There is no 'bury and forget' option: the only safe solution for the moment is to keep a constant eye on this pernicious substance, since as yet there are no safe final disposal methods available."

Campaigners fear that unless the necessary steps are taken, individual EU governments might try to dispose of highly volatile liquid mercury in unsafe places like old mines, where there is a strong risk of its leaching out over time into water supplies and the air. A European Directive which prohibits final disposal of liquid waste in landfills has been in place since 1999.

Campaigners also want to see a ban on exporting mercury compounds and mercury-containing items whose sale is banned in the EU.

"It's not just a question of controlling pure mercury", said Lisette van Vliet of Health Care Without Harm. "If the export ban doesn't include mercury compounds or mercury-containing products which are already banned from sale in Europe, we'll be overlooking a major source of Europe's contribution to global mercury contamination". Compounds represent a high proportion of the world's mercury use, and mercury can be profitably recovered from compounds including calomel, mercuric oxide, mercuric chloride and other organo-mercury compounds.

NGOs in developing countries are very concerned. "Historically, when a hazardous product is restricted, phased-out or banned in Europe, it's often exported to developing countries where awareness of the problem is often relatively low, and regulations and/or enforcement are often lax or non-existent", said Veronica Odriozola, Director of Health Care Without Harm Latin America.

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Notes for editors:-

[Letter to Commissioners: NGOs call for a wide reaching mercury export ban and safe storage of surplus mercury](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070608NGOsletterto%20Commissioners.pdf), [8 June 2007] http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070608NGOsletterto%20Commissioners.pdf

[Letter to Environment Ministers: NGOs call for a wide reaching mercury export ban and safe storage of surplus mercury](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070606NGOs%20Letter%20to%20Env%20Mins%20Export%20Ban.pdf), [6 June 2007] http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070606NGOs%20Letter%20to%20Env%20Mins%20Export%20Ban.pdf