



## PRESS RELEASE

### EU mercury export ban advances, safer liquid mercury storage now being considered

**(Brussels/Luxembourg, 28 June, 2007)** - Anti-mercury campaigners today expressed mixed feelings at the outcome of the Environment Council's ruling on the movement and handling of mercury. Environment ministers from the EU's 27 national governments were meeting to decide on the European Commission's proposed regulation on banning mercury exports from the EU and ensuring the safe storage of the toxic metal.

"Although we're glad the legislation is moving forward, we're disappointed that ministers did nothing to close the loopholes in the mercury export ban," said Elena Lymberidi, EEB's 'Zero Mercury' campaign project coordinator. "Currently the Council has refused to include mercury compounds in the ban, despite many EU governments supporting such a move. So the door is still wide open for hundreds of tonnes of mercury to be exported indirectly from the EU."

The Environment Council refused to include in the ban mercury-containing products whose sale is forbidden in the EU. "EU ministers have squandered an excellent chance to halt the export of mercury-containing products to developing countries," said Lisette van Vliet of Health Care Without Harm Europe. "It's rank hypocrisy to restrict trade in these products within Europe, but allow them to be exported to our neighbours in the global south."

The environment ministers kept the implementation date of 1 July 2011 for the export ban, ignoring the European Parliament's demand for the earlier deadline of 1 December 2010. NGOs had pressed for an even earlier date to prevent toxic mercury exports to developing countries even sooner.

NGOs were cautiously pleased at the Council's agreement today on the issue of storing mercury. The Council decided that requirements for storage facilities and the criteria to accept storage of liquid metallic mercury must be adopted before any final disposal can occur. The Commission would have to submit a report reviewing research on safe disposal options including the 'solidification' of liquid mercury, one year before the export ban start. The Commission then, may present a proposal to revise the regulation as soon as possible and before two years after the ban begins. "At last, environment ministers have realised the danger of already allowing the final disposal of metallic mercury, especially since disposing of liquid waste is explicitly forbidden by the EU Landfill Directive," said Elena Lymberidi of EEB. Depending on the outcome of the research, permanent underground storage of liquid mercury may still have to be seriously reconsidered. "We've got to get the storage issue right. If liquid mercury is just dumped and forgotten, we would be leaving our children a lethal legacy."

The Environment Council also insisted that the regulation has a legal basis that makes it harder, if not impossible, for individual EU countries to impose stricter national provisions on the export ban.

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**Notes for editors:-**

Mercury is a global pollutant which drifts far across the world. Its most toxic form, methylmercury, accumulates in large predatory fish which we eat, affecting the most vulnerable people, children and pregnant women.

See letters sent to the institutions:-

To the European Parliament (13 June 2007):

[http://www.zeromercury.org/EU\\_developments/070613NGOsLettertoEP-plenary-Hg-export-ban.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070613NGOsLettertoEP-plenary-Hg-export-ban.pdf)

To Environment Committee of the European Parliament (26 April 2007):

[http://www.zeromercury.org/EU\\_developments/070426NGOS\\_1stReadingENVI\\_Hg\\_Export\\_ban.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070426NGOS_1stReadingENVI_Hg_Export_ban.pdf)

Letter to Commissioners:(8 June 2007)

[http://www.zeromercury.org/EU\\_developments/070608NGOsletterto%20Commissioners.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070608NGOsletterto%20Commissioners.pdf)

[Letter to Environment Ministers](#) (6 June 2007)

[http://www.zeromercury.org/EU\\_developments/070606NGOs'%20Letter%20to%20Env%20Mins%20Export%20Ban.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/070606NGOs'%20Letter%20to%20Env%20Mins%20Export%20Ban.pdf)