



RELEASE FOR FEBRUARY 4!

For immediate release:

New Study Raises Concern over Mercury Pollution from Burning Products

Feb. 4, 2009; [Brussels] - A new international study released today shows how the burning of mercury-containing products is increasing the risk of environmental and health impacts around the world. [1] The study states that incineration and burning send upwards of 200 tons of mercury into the atmosphere every year, comprising 10 percent of the mercury that enters the earth's atmosphere through human activities.

"Based on this report's findings, we must recognize that the amount of mercury released into the atmosphere through incineration and burning is much more significant than previously suspected, representing at least twice the emissions as previously thought," said Michael Bender, Director of the Mercury Policy Project.

The study, entitled "*Mercury Rising: Reducing Global Emissions from Burning Mercury-Added Products*," has been released by several international non-governmental organizations.¹ Similar studies that previously estimated mercury emissions from the combustion of wastes and products containing mercury did not look carefully at the substantial emissions contributed by landfill fires and open burning of domestic waste in addition to incinerators. The report underscores the harmful environmental and health impacts posed by incineration and burning.

The main burning processes investigated in the report were medical waste incineration, municipal and hazardous waste incineration, municipal wastewater sludge incineration, landfill fires and open burning of discarded products such as fluorescent light bulbs and mercury thermometers.

Using Asia as an example, the magnitude of emissions in East and Southeast Asia due to landfill fires and open burning of domestic waste are shown to be quite significant, reflecting a combination of open burning, especially in rural areas, a large quantity of products containing mercury in the region and very low recycling rates. In Japan, the generation of large volumes of waste, relatively high use of mercury-added products and incineration of a very high percentage of waste also contribute to the magnitude of regional atmospheric mercury content.

The report recommends that, at the upcoming February meeting in Nairobi, of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), establish an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the purpose of negotiating a free-standing legally binding instrument on mercury.

In the interim period before such an instrument becomes effective, the report recommends UNEP take the following actions:

- Assume responsibility for the awareness-raising, analytical, technical and legal support activities necessary to encourage manufacturers of mercury-added products, and countries where such manufacturers are located, to identify and implement the actions; and
- Recognize that combustion of mercury-added products in incinerators, landfill fires and open burning of domestic waste is a significant contributor of mercury and other toxics in both local and global ecosystems, and urge countries to take steps to stop these practices and move towards safe, just, sustainable and more environmentally-sound alternatives.

END

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The report "Mercury Rising: Reducing Global Emissions from Burning Mercury-Added Products" is available at

http://www.zeromercury.org/International_developments/FINAL_MercuryRising_Feb2009.pdf

Press release, available at <http://www.zeromercury.org/press/090204-HgBurnPRfinal.pdf>

Notes:

[1] Mercury and its compounds are highly toxic to humans, especially to the developing nervous system. They are also harmful to ecosystems and wildlife populations.

For more information about mercury please visit: www.zeromercury.org

ⁱ This report is authored by the **Mercury Policy Project**: see www.mercurypolicy.org, and is co-released by the following:

The **Zero Mercury Working group** is an international coalition of more than 75 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 continually reduce emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, with the goal of eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally. Please see www.zeromercury.org

Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives / Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance (GAIA) is a worldwide alliance of more than 600 grassroots groups, non-governmental organizations, and individuals in over 80 countries whose ultimate vision is a just, toxic-free world without incineration. GAIA work against incinerators and for safe, sustainable and just alternatives. Further information may be found at www.no-burn.org

Ban Toxics! is an independent non-profit Asian regional environmental non-governmental organization that is focused on empowering local communities on the issue of toxics in order to reform national and regional toxics policy, making it more responsive and respectful to the needs of people and the environment. Ban Toxics! is an active member of Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) and is the Asia-Pacific node of the Basel Action Network. Please see www.bantoxics.multiply.com