



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Turning up the pressure** *Phasing out mercury measuring devices in hospitals*

**(Brussels, 18 June 2009)** –Leading environmental and health NGOs released a report today [1] at their conference in Brussels clearly demonstrating that the transition to mercury-free measuring devices including sphygmomanometers (sphygmom) [2] in hospitals is technologically and economically feasible. Many hospitals in the EU have already implemented this change since suitable mercury-free alternatives are currently available on the market.

‘Switching to mercury-free sphygmom should not cause any problems in terms of clinical diagnosis and monitoring. In fact it should improve the accuracy of blood pressure measurement in clinical settings,’ said Peter Orris, MD, a Professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago, a WHO Collaborating Center in Occupational and Environmental Health and speaker at today’s conference. “Continued use of mercury blood pressure devices is unnecessary.”

“Countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain and Poland have already made the switch,” said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Zero Mercury Project Coordinator at the EEB. “It should therefore be possible for the rest of the EU.”

The report, “Turning up the pressure: Phasing out mercury sphygmomanometers for professional use,” discusses real-life experiences of European hospitals that use mercury-containing and mercury-free sphygmom and demonstrates beyond any doubt that mercury sphygmom are no longer needed in the healthcare sector, emphasising that the transition is doable today.

Suitable mercury-free blood pressure gauges are validated by professional bodies and are reliable for routine as well as specialised use. Replacing mercury measuring devices with substitutes will help reduce hazardous mercury waste and its potential risks to the natural environment and humans. [3]

Mercury-containing sphygmom have long been considered as the ‘gold standard’ by the medical profession. Nevertheless, the European Commission is in the process of reviewing the availability of reliable safer mercury-free alternatives and if appropriate, will present a legislative proposal to extend restrictions for relevant identified uses by October 2009. [4]

‘It is time that the EU follows the lead of other countries, rather than hiding behind an out of date ‘gold standard’,’ said Anja Leetz, Executive Director of HCWH Europe. “Mercury free hospitals are widely found in the US, Argentina, the Philippines and elsewhere around the world. European legislators need to move forward and adapt European law to reality.”

Today’s conference organised by the EEB, ZMWG and HCWHE, “EU Mercury phase out in measuring and control equipment”, contributes to the EU debate towards eliminating mercury in measuring devices, including sphygmom and porosimeters, which measure pore size. For the latter and other devices the European Commission should ensure at the very least, that all mercury used is fully recycled, and further investigate phasing out mercury devices from these sectors as well.

“Banning mercury-devices in the EU would set the stage for global action,” said Michael Bender, Co-coordinator of the Zero Mercury Working Group.

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**Editors Notes:-**

[1] The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) is a federation of over 150 environmental citizens' organisations based in most EU Member States, most candidate and potential candidate countries as well as in a few neighbouring countries. EEB is the environmental voice of European citizens, standing for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. We want the EU to ensure all people a healthy environment and rich biodiversity.

The Zero Mercury Working Group is an international coalition of more than 80 public interest environmental and health non-governmental organizations from 42 countries from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project. The aim of the group is to strive for 'Zero' emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, eventually eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally.

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH-Europe) is the European branch of an international coalition of hospitals, medical professionals and environmental organisations working to transform the health care sector, 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. The coalition has offices in Arlington, Brussels, Buenos Aires and Manila with over 470 members in 52 countries.

The full report can be found here:

[http://www.eeb.org/publication/2009/SphygReport\\_EEB\\_Final-A5\\_11Jun2009.pdf](http://www.eeb.org/publication/2009/SphygReport_EEB_Final-A5_11Jun2009.pdf)

[2] Medical devices which measure blood pressure.

[3] Mercury is highly toxic, causing damage to the nervous system, and is particularly harmful during the early development phases of children. Mercury can become more concentrated as it is ingested by tiny organisms and moves up the food chain, accumulating in the bodies of humans and wildlife. Mercury travels long distances through the atmosphere, and has contaminated global food supplies at levels that can pose a significant risk to human health. For this reason, the NGOs are pressing for mercury measuring devices to be swiftly phased out. Mercury containing sphygmomanometers are still used in European hospitals and by general practitioners and are therefore a source of mercury release to the environment and also poses a risk to staff and patients health.

[4] For more information on the developments of this directive visit:

[http://www.zeromercury.org/EU\\_developments/indexMeasuringDevices.html](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/indexMeasuringDevices.html)