



PRESS RELEASE

Red Card for Mercury! Time for total ban

(Brussels, 19 June 2006) - At a conference today, environmental and health NGOsⁱ demanded a total mercury export ban to take effect by 2008 at the latest, and that surplus mercury be securely stored in perpetuity. They pressed the Commission urgently to present a proposal to regulate mercury. NGOs also called for the Directive restricting the use of all measuring and control equipment containing mercury to be broadened. There is no safe level for mercury. Immediate measures are therefore needed to eliminate it.

“Anti-mercury NGOs insist that the export ban should apply to the widest possible range of mercury-based substances, including compounds and products containing mercury”, said Elena Lymberidi, ‘Zero Mercury Campaign’ Project Coordinator at the European Environmental Bureau. “The EU’s double standard must change”, said Michael Bender, of the Ban Mercury Working Group. “Allowing both the continued export of feedstock for major uses of mercury, and products containing mercury, increases the risk that people and the environment in non-EU countries are exposed to mercury and mercury pollution, while EU citizens are protected.”

It is estimated that converting liquid mercury into a compound, before converting it back to elemental mercury once it has left the EU, costs about US\$200 per flask. At the current market price of about \$600 or more per flask, unscrupulous traders could take advantage of the “mercury compound loophole”, convert the mercury to a compound for export, have it converted back to elemental mercury outside the EU, and still make a profit. Only recently, the price of mercury was just \$200 a flask.

NGOs have demanded the establishment of a tracking system to monitor the import, export and intra-EU transport of metallic mercury and its compounds, plus a review of ways in which the scope of the ban and mercury storage can be extended, ahead of the effective export ban deadline.

In view of the 20 June Council Working Group meeting on the issue, environmental and health NGOs are urging the Council to strengthen the Commission’s proposed restriction on the use and marketing of measuring and control equipment containing mercury. “All consumer and professional uses should be included in the restriction, with special focus on blood pressure measuring devices in hospitals, with exemptions for only a limited period and only where alternatives don’t exist,” said Karolina Ruzickova, of Health Care Without Harm. “Hospitals in many EU countries are already becoming mercury-free. There are serious occupational hazards for healthcare workers who are in contact with leaking or broken devices. Mercury waste management is expensive and creates potential risks for mercury emissions in the environment.” The European Parliament’s March 2006 resolution called for a wider scope including the restriction of health-care equipment containing mercury.

We urge EU Institutions swiftly to adopt the proposals, to help reduce mercury supply and demand in the EU and worldwide, in line with UNEP Governing Council recommendations.

For more information please refer to:-

Link to conference agenda: http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/060619-BXL-conference.html

Link to: Zero Mercury – key issues and policy recommendations for the EU strategy on mercury
http://www.zeromercury.org/Zero_Mercury_Policy_Paper_EN.pdf

Elena Lymberidi, Zero Mercury Campaign Project Coordinator, EEB: www.zeromercury.org; www.eeb.org;
elena.lymberidi@eeb.org;

Tel: +32 (0)2 289 1301

Peter Clarke, Press Officer, EEB: press@eeb.org; Tel: +32 (0)2 289 1309

Karolina Ruzickova, Health Care Without Harm Europe: www.noharm.org; karolina.ruzickova@hcwh.org Tel:
+410 222 78 14 71

Genon K. Jensen, EPHA Environment Network (EEN): www.env-health.org ; genon@env-health.org; Tel: +32
(0)2 2333875

Michael Bender, Ban Mercury Working Group: www.ban.org/Ban-Hg-Wg/ Mercurypolicy@aol.com; Tel: +1 802
2239000

ⁱ 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 initially in 2004 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, in view of reducing to a minimum, mercury in the environment at EU level and globally."

The **Ban Mercury Working Group**, www.ban.org/Ban-Hg-Wg/, is an international coalition of 27 public interest non-governmental organisations from around the world formed initially in 2002 by 2 US based NGOs, the Basel Action Network (www.ban.org) and the Mercury Policy Project (www.Mercurypolicy.org). working to end pollution from the toxic metal -- Mercury.

European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN), <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, 29 members with 5 international organisations, 10 European networks and 14 national/local organisations, including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors and nurses, 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, and environmental and environmental health 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).