

Brussels, 13 October, 2016

EU back on track to address global mercury crisis

The European Parliament's Environment Committee (ENVI) voted this morning (13 October) to strengthen the European Commission's proposal for a mercury regulation [1]. This moves the EU a step closer towards ratifying the Minamata Convention on Mercury [2].

The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) applauded ENVI for playing an important leadership role in taking concrete steps to reduce exposure to this toxic substance that is especially dangerous for the developing nervous system.

Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Zero Mercury Campaign Project Manager, commented:

"ENVI sent a clear message to the European Commission and EU Member States that it wants to see a robust mercury regulation going beyond the minimal requirements of the Minamata Convention. The EU is getting back on track to address the global mercury crisis."

In particular, the committee made it clear that double standards should be avoided and that mercury-added products already prohibited in the EU should not be exported with the risk that they may end up in countries with less stringent mercury management.

ENVI also expressed overwhelming support to phase out mercury in dentistry as the most effective way to prevent dental mercury pollution.

However, the EEB remains concerned with the decision to allow the disposal of solidified mercury waste in above ground facilities as this may pose much higher risks than if it were put underground.

Likewise, the EEB regretted the rejection of amendments to further control mercury emissions in the air and releases to water from the largest emitters[4].

Christian Schaible, EEB Policy Manager Industrial Production, said:

"The main point source emitters of mercury, namely coal combustion plants, can continue to spit tonnes of mercury into the air until new stricter EU standards are agreed. Decision makers are gambling with environmental and human health protection."

The EEB will now call on Member States to accept the proposed ENVI amendments that will reduce and eliminate all unnecessary uses and releases of mercury.

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Notes to editors:

[1] Adopted amendments include the following:

- The export ban on mercury-added products to be aligned with the restrictions already applied within the EU.
- Mercury in dentistry to be phased out by end 2022, and for children and pregnant women within one year from entry into force of the regulation.
- Liquid mercury waste must be solidified before disposal.
- Mercury used in processes as a catalyst or as electrode should be phased out within the 4 years from entry into force of the regulation. Different industries have different deadlines.
- The export ban should be expanded to include three additional mercury compounds
- Import of mercury and listed mercury compounds shall be prohibited; import for disposal is permitted, initially until December 2027.
- Contaminated sites by mercury or its compounds shall be identified and national decontamination strategies shall be adopted by the MS.

[2] Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury by the EU

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/mercury/ratification_en.htm

The Minamata Convention on Mercury <http://www.mercuryconvention.org>

[3] Mercury and its compounds are highly toxic to humans, especially to the developing nervous system. Mercury transforms to neurotoxic methylmercury, which has the capacity to collect in organisms (bioaccumulate) and to concentrate up food chains (biomagnify), especially in the aquatic food chain – fish, the basic food source for millions of people.

[4]AM 235 was proposing to set a mercury limit with what is achievable by implementing BAT for Large Combustion Plants

[5] [EEB calls for an ambitious EU mercury regulation, ENVI, 1st Reading Vote, 13th October 2016, 12/10/2016](#)

[EEB voting recommendations for an ambitious EU mercury regulation, ENVI 1st Reading 12/10/2016](#)

[Lifting Europe's Dark cloud](#) , 11/10/2016 and [Health and Economic Implications of Alternative Emission Limits for coal fired power plants in the EU](#), May 2015

[EEB proposals to ensure a robust revised EU mercury Regulation \(sent to ENVI\) – 4 July 2016](#)

[NGOs letter to ENVI – Phase out mercury from dentistry in the EU](#)

[EEB-WA Memo on Technical advantages of mercury free dentistry](#)