

EU science opinion indicates that dental mercury waste can contaminate fish Findings support EC consultant's proposal to ban amalgam, say NGOs

[26 September 2013, Brussels]- Environmental NGOs[i] called on the European Commission to now move forward on a proposed ban on dental amalgam, highlighting one of the key findings in a new opinion from the Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER). The SCHER opinion states that under certain conditions dental mercury can methylate and that: *"the acceptable level in food is*

exceeded...It follows that a risk for secondary poisoning due to methylation cannot be excluded.

"While the SCHER report underestimated and appears not able to assess environmental impacts from most pathways, particularly from cremation, it confirmed what we've known for the past decade: that dental mercury waste can methylate and accumulate in the fish people eat." said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Project Manager ' Zero Mercury Campaign' at the European Environmental Bureau . "This is clear grounds to ban amalgam, since its release cannot be cost effectively controlled and mercury free alternatives are already available, affordable and determined effective by the many Member States who have already phased out amalgam."

Many countries—including Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands—have taken steps to phase out dental amalgam for environmental reasons and their dentists now use mostly mercury-free alternatives. Amalgam is currently the second-largest source of mercury pollution in Europe, and if steps are not taken to eliminate its use, it will soon become the first.

A growing percentage of EU dentists no longer use amalgam nor support its continued use. In addition, the EU dental manufacturers and others attending a recent conference in the UK understand and expect that amalgam use will soon end.

"The end of amalgam in Europe is inevitable," said Dr Graeme Munro-Hall, a U.K. dentist and a member of the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry. "At the European Dental Materials Conference in Birmingham last month, the major topic was 'the demise of amalgam use.' The dental schools are not far behind."

Mercury is a highly neurotoxic product which can cause brain damage or even death to children and fetuses. Its presence in fish and hence children's diets helped spur action by the European Union against all major uses of mercury, leading to the phasing out of mercury in several products and industrial processes. The E.U. helped lead the negotiations of the international community on a draft treaty on mercury, to be formally adopted next month in Japan. ###

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Background reading :

- Study on the potential for reducing mercury pollution from dental amalgam and batteries, Final report prepared for the European Commission – DG ENV, BIO Intelligence Service (2012). <u>http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/mercury/pdf/final report 1107</u> 12_en.pdf UK meeting manufacturers

- <u>Stone et al. (2003) –Determination of methyl mercury in</u> <u>dental-unit wastewater</u>

- SCHER 2013 Preliminary Opinion on the environmental risks and indirect health effects of mercury from dental amalgam (update) <u>http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific</u> committees/environmental_risks/docs/scher_o_164.pdf

- <u>http://ec.europa.eu/health/scientific_committees/consultations/public_consultations/scher</u> <u>cons_06_en.htm</u>

[i] The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) is Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations. It is the environmental voice of European citizens, standing for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. Our aim is to ensure the EU secures a healthy environment and rich biodiversity for all.

The World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry (WAMFD) is a coalition of NGOs dedicated to ending dental mercury pollution. We work with NGOs, dentists, and dental patients on six continents and throughout the EU Member States.