



To:
Günter Verheugen, Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry

Copied to:
Stavros Dimas, Commissioner for Environment
Androula Vassiliou, Commissioner for Health

Brussels, 13 November 2009

Dear Commissioner,

Environmental and Health NGOs call for a rapid process to phase out of mercury-containing blood pressure devices in healthcare.

With this letter we would like to once more express our concerns with respect to the use of mercury in blood pressure devices in healthcare.

We would further like to call your attention on the new report issued by the Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks, under the Directorate General for Health and Consumers of the European Commission on *'Mercury Sphygmomanometers in Healthcare and the Feasibility of Alternatives'* (23 September 2009).

We welcome this report as a significant step forward in terms of providing guidance for substituting mercury-based blood pressure devices for safer alternatives that will protect patients, healthcare workers and the global environment.

The report finds that "mercury-free blood pressure measuring devices (when clinically validated) are generally reliable substitutes for mercury-containing sphygmomanometers in routine clinical practice." It also concludes that "there is no evidence of adverse effects on patients' health in clinical settings due to the replacement of mercury containing sphygmomanometers by validated mercury-free alternatives."

The report further finds that mercury-based sphygmomanometers are "not essential" for calibration. Therefore, due to the acute toxic hazard to health care workers and chronic hazard to society, these devices have no place in clinical care.

The report notes two exceptions where mercury-based sphygmomanometers may be used, which are important to underscore, although the mercury amount used is minimal:

Firstly, several "long-term epidemiological studies" began years ago using mercury-based devices and in order to assure comparability of data will need to continue to use these.

Secondly, consumer protective validation studies are now conducted by several manufacturer independent professional agencies on all new models of sphygmomanometers prior to their entry into the market. These studies are based on protocols developed over the past decades, which depend upon mercury sphygmomanometers as comparisons. Therefore, the report notes that

mercury-based sphygmomanometers will need to continue to be used as a “reference standard...until an alternative device is developed and recognized as such.”

The European Environmental Bureau and Health Care Without Harm, have been contributing to this discussion for many years¹, with numerous studies and evidence from practices in hospitals in Europe and around the world, showing that mercury –free healthcare is a reality. To that end, we are pleased to enclose a copy of:

- the study ‘Turning up the pressure: Phasing out mercury sphygmomanometers for professional use’, June 2009, carried out for EEB.
- the report from the recent conference we organised on 18th June 2009 on ‘EU Mercury phase out in Measuring and Control Equipment’, October 2009.
- the report on ‘The Accuracy of Alternatives to Mercury Sphygmomanometers’, October 2009, carried out for HCWH.

We hope that you will find the findings of the reports useful.

On the basis of the above, we would therefore urge you to ensure the:

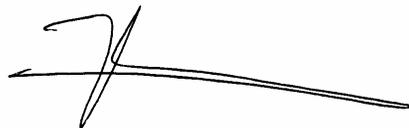
- 1. Rapid Phase-out of Clinical Mercury-Sphygmomanometers sales via the REACH restriction route:** Based on the Scientific Committee’s report, the European Commission should ensure an efficient and speedy process through the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) leading to the prohibition against the placing on the market of mercury-based blood pressure devices for healthcare, as soon as possible; and
- 2. Development and Validation of an Alternative Reference Standard:** In the medium term the EU should invest the relatively small amount of resources necessary to develop a viable non-mercury reference standard for blood pressure measurement that can serve as a new mercury-free “gold” standard.

We are looking forward to receiving the Commission’s report to ECHA and are hopeful that the manufacture and use of mercury-based sphygmomanometers will soon be history in Europe and globally.

Yours sincerely,



Anja Leetz
Executive Director
Health Care Without Harm Europe



John Hontelez
Secretary General
European Environmental Bureau

¹ http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/indexMeasuringDevices.html and http://www.noharm.org/all_regions/issues/toxins/mercury/