



**[Geneva, Switzerland, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2009]** Hailed as “a breakthrough” by Green Groups, an agreement in concept was reached yesterday by a World Health Organization (W.H.O)-convened international expert group, supporting the “phase down” of dental mercury use worldwide [1]. However, the groups note that there is still much work to be done on deciding how and when a global amalgam phase down will occur.

*“As a first step, I’m pleased to positively support a global ‘phase down’ on dental mercury use to reduce environmental releases,”*

said Michael Bender, meeting participant representing the Zero Mercury Working Group and director of the U.S.-based Mercury Policy Project.

*“We also recognised that fostering the increased use of mercury-free alternatives must tie in with W.H. O. ’s commendable goal of bringing affordable dental healthcare to the global population.”*

W.H.O. recognises that world governments reached a consensus on the need for a legally binding treaty to reduce global mercury exposure [2]. They said that the *“Meeting on the Future Use of Materials for Dental Restoration WHO/HQ” in Geneva* was intended

*“to provide global guidelines and strategies for future biomaterials use,”* and address the different challenges for richer and poorer countries [3].

*“It was evident from the presentations at the meeting that mercury-free dental fillings are already widely used in some developing countries, so reality may be overtaking policy decisions,”*

said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, observer at the meeting and coordinator of the European Environmental Bureau’s Zero Mercury Campaign. “

*Medical insurance covering*

*alternative materials could be crucial for a swifter transition allowing tooth-coloured fillings to become the rule and not the exception to dental treatment”.*

Last week, a letter signed by over 70 non-governmental organisations from around the world called on the W.H.O to establish a schedule to phase out the use of dental mercury fillings as soon as possible [4].

A 2005 W.H.O. Policy Paper on “*Mercury in Health Care*” states that: “*Mercury is highly toxic, especially when metabolized into methyl mercury... Recent studies suggest that mercury may have no threshold below which some adverse effects do not occur.*”

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**Editors Notes:**

**About mercury:** Mercury is persistent and can be transformed in the environment into methylmercury, its most toxic form, which readily passes through both the placenta and blood-brain barriers. It accumulates in the bodies of humans and wildlife and can become more concentrated as it moves up the food chain, and poses a particular risk to pregnant women and

young children who eat contaminated fish.

**Previous relevant PR:** Time to pull mercury out of fillings, say Health and Green groups to W.H.O.

(also in FR, DE, ES), 16 November 2009

[1] The W.H.O. provisional meeting agenda: <http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEPdevelopments/Agenda-22oct09.pdf>

Besides W.H.O. and UNEP officials, those attending the meeting were from: FDI World Dental Federation; the American and Canadian Dental Associations, the Nordic Institute of Dental Materials, the Centre for Side-effects of Dental Materials in Norway, the Ministry of Social Protection from Colombia and expert scientists from University Dental Schools' from the US, China, Kuwait, Sweden, Ireland, S. Africa, Japan, Thailand, UK, as well as environmental NGOs - European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project founding members of the Zero Mercury Working Group. Presentations covered and reported on situation concerning dental treatment in almost all of the world regions.

[2] U.N. Environment Council Decision 25 on mercury (starting on p.20): <http://www.chem.unep.ch/MERCURY/GC25/GC25ReportEnglish255.pdf>

[3] The WHO's 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009 correspondence recognised that world governments reached a consensus in February 2009 on the need for a global legally binding treaty to significantly reduce global mercury exposure:

*"...awareness of the environmental implications of mercury has increased markedly over recent years, and mercury is a matter of concern to several countries and international organizations.... Furthermore, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has launched an initiative on avoiding the contamination of the environment from mercury which has implications to the use of dental amalgam in countries... The*

*advantages and disadvantages of these alternatives need to be analyzed in order for WHO to update the knowledge base and give advice to countries in this matter. The intention of the meeting is to provide global guidelines and strategies for the future use of biomaterials and the challenges are different for high-, middle-, and low-income countries.”*

Link:

[http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP\\_developments/1-bender-let.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP_developments/1-bender-let.pdf)

[4] NGO 13 November letter to W.H.O.: <http://mercurypolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/091113>  
ngos sign on letter to who dental.pdf

[5] 2005 WHO paper: [http://www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/medicalwaste/mercurypolpaper.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/medicalwaste/mercurypolpaper.pdf)