



EU TO EXPAND PHASE-OUT OF MERCURY MEASURING DEVICES

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03/10/2012, Brussels—Health Care Without Harm(HCWH), the European Environment Bureau(EEB) and the Zero Mercury Working Group today applauded the EU’s decision to take off the market mercury sphygmomanometers and other measuring devices for industrial and professional use starting April 2014[i].

“This is an important step forward that will move the entire European Union quickly toward mercury-free health care,” said Anja Leetz, Executive Director of HCWH Europe. “The mercury column sphygmomanometer will soon become an historical relic in Europe.”

“Substituting such devices[ii] not only takes 7,6 tons of mercury off the market, ” said Elena

Lymberidi-Settimo, Project Coordinator 'Zero Mercury Campaign' at the EEB, “but in doing so, EU governments send a strong signal that they will likely call for similar measures to be enshrined in the global mercury treaty text that is currently entering the final stages of negotiation.”

The EU regulation, makes minor exceptions for blood pressure devices already in use in ongoing epidemiological studies and as reference standards in clinical validation studies of mercury-free sphygmomanometers, as well as for a couple of other instruments.

The regulation also amends the existing 2007 ban on mercury thermometers^[iii]. It is based on a clear finding by a European Commission scientific committee 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.”

[iv]

“By mandating the phase-out of nearly all mercury-based medical devices, the European Union is sending a signal to the rest of the world that mercury-free health care is the future,” said Josh Karliner, International Coordinator for HCWH and co-leader of a joint Global Initiative with the World Health Organization to phase-out mercury-based medical devices around the world.

“One of the objectives of this global initiative—to phase out mercury sphygmomanometers in the European Union—has now been achieved.”

Yet work remains to be done. “For the regulation to be fully effective, we also need EU measures to collect and manage in an environmentally safe manner, the 134 tonnes [v] of mercury in devices already present in the market, as highlighted by the EU Chemicals Agency committees’ experts

[vi]”said Michael Bender, International Co-coordinator of ZMWG, “Furthermore production of such devices intended for export should be addressed, and the EC needs to urgently investigate the use of mercury in porosimeters since they represent the biggest use of mercury in measuring equipment (5-14 tonnes) - and propose relevant new legislative measures.”

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Note to the editors

The EU regulation can be found here: (adopted on 19 September 2012) <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:253:0001:0004:EN:PDF>

The EU Scientific Committee Report can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihp/docs/scenihp_o_025.pdf

The WHO-HCWH Global Mercury-Free Healthcare Initiative here: www.mercuryfreehealthcare.org

The Zero Mercury Working Group here: www.zeromercury.org

Health Care Without Harm here: www.noharm.org

[i] The EU regulation can be found here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:253:0001:0004:EN:PDF>

[ii] Barometers, hygrometers, manometers, sphygmomanometers, strain gauges to be used with plethysmographs, tensiometers, thermometers and other non –electrical thermometric applications, mercury pycnometers, mercury metering devices for determination of the softening point

[iii] And other measuring devices for consumer use.

[iv] The EU Scientific Committee Report: http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/docs/scenihr_o_025.pdf

[v] http://echa.europa.eu/documents/10162/13641/seac_draft_opinion_hg_in_meas_devices_en.pdf

[vi] http://echa.europa.eu/documents/10162/13641/5-7-2011_measuring_devices_final_4th_opinion_en.pdf and http://echa.europa.eu/documents/10162/13641/seac_draft_opinion_hg_in_meas_devices_en.pdf