



[Geneva, Switzerland, 16th November, 2009] -Today, at an expert meeting on the future use of dental fillings, a letter signed [1] by over 70 non-governmental organisations from around the world was presented, calling on the World Health Organization (WHO) to establish a schedule to phase out the use of dental mercury fillings as soon as possible.

"We strongly urge the WHO to foster the innovative use of mercury-free alternatives in parallel with its commendable goal of bringing affordable dental healthcare to the global population,"

said Michael Bender of the U.S.-based Mercury Policy Project.

"This is entirely consistent with the vast number of similar initiatives going on worldwide to phase out the use of mercury in products and processes."

In their letter, the groups point out that mercury from dental use can drift long distances through the atmosphere and contamination from this dangerous neurotoxin poses a major worldwide threat to both human health and the environment.

They also point out that there are various pathways where mercury from dental amalgams is haphazardly released and where it can be only partially controlled (dental clinics, waste water and sewage sludge, crematoria, cemeteries etc.)

"It is generally accepted that effective global control of these releases would be not only

impossible, but also inordinately expensive,"

said Elena Lymberidi, coordinator of the European Environmental Bureau's Zero Mercury Campaign;

"Therefore, over

time, the more cost effective solution is that mercury-free fillings become the rule and not the exception to dental treatment."

The WHO recently recognised the fact that world governments have reached a consensus on the need for a legally binding treaty to reduce global mercury exposure. The WHO said that today's meeting is intended to provide information for future biomaterials use, as well as address the different challenges to richer and poorer countries [2].

"There are a growing number of examples where developed countries have dramatically reduced or practically eliminated dental mercury use,"

said Rico Euripidou of Friends of the Earth, South Africa.

"However, we understand the

challenges developing countries face in phasing out mercury uses and recognise that an innovative and differentiated approach may be necessary."

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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.

Editors Notes:

[1] NGOs letter to WHO http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEPdevelopments/091113NGOsSignonlettertoWHO_Dental.pdf

[2] The WHO's 22nd 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."

REFERENCE:

http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEP_developments/1-bender-let.pdf
<http://www.zeromercury.org/UNEPdevelopments/Agenda-22oct09.pdf>