



PRESS RELEASE



Risky Business: Phase-out mercury in chlorine industry

(Brussels, 10 November 2006) – EEB today repeated its call to halt use of the ‘mercury-cell process’ in the chlorine industry. EEB, Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations, reports that every year the EU's chlorine industry discharges tonnes of mercury into the environment, contributing to the mercury accumulated in the world's atmosphere and mercury build-up in fish, and exposing consumers, especially pregnant women and children, to serious health risks. Since more efficient and less dangerous methods can produce chlorine without mercury, and are already available, EEB seeks the urgent abolition of factories using this harmful process.

The impact of Europe's chlor-alkali plants is highlighted in a study for EEB by Concorde East/West Sprl. It reveals growing evidence that mercury air emissions from the EU's chlorine plants may be significantly under-reported, by as much as five times, and might even equal emission levels from the EU's large coal-fired power stations. EEB has also issued its own report, including independent air quality sampling results from around mercury-cell chlor-alkali factories in Italy, Spain and the Czech Republic, which found disturbingly high mercury levels around ten of the eleven plants monitored.

EEB regards the study's findings and the monitoring results as proof that chlor-alkali plants should urgently be phased out. This accords with international agreements (OSPAR Commission's Decision (90/3)) and the European Parliament's March 2006 Resolution.

"We must immediately stop using mercury to produce chlorine. It's archaic and environmentally-hazardous. Non-mercury alternatives have been commercially available since the eighties", said Elena Lymberidi, EEB's Zero Mercury Campaign project coordinator. "The study concludes that the total cost of converting all EU mercury-cell chlor-alkali plants (MCCAPs) to mercury-free operation is far outweighed by the economic and health benefits. The mercury-cell process isn't the 'Best Available Technique' (BAT) for the chlor-alkali sector under the Integrated Pollution Prevention & Control (IPPC) Directive. Authorities should therefore deny new operating permits if they don't incorporate BAT."

EEB has recommended to EU and national policy-makers that they:-

- Phase out the mercury-cell process as soon as possible, and by 2010 at the latest, as part of an EU initiative or national commitment, (in contrast to industry's 2020 commitment)
- Safely store surplus mercury from decommissioned plants so it can't be re-sold
- Remove mercury contamination resulting from plant operation and waste disposal
- Deny operating permits (under the IPPC Directive) to plants using obsolete non-BAT technology
- Prepare full guidelines for decommissioning plants and safely storing all mercury
- Ensure continuous, comprehensive and independently-verified monitoring of mercury emissions from plants, on-site, and at site perimeters, and full accounting for any unexplained loss of mercury from the process
- Improved monitoring of factory workers' and local residents' health.

"The World Chlorine Council estimates there are some 135 mercury plants still operating around the world, of which 45-50 still operate in the EU. They represent half of Europe's chlorine production, based on this outdated mercury-cell technology. It's high time this changes", said Stefan Scheuer, EEB's EU Policy Director.

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