



## PRESS RELEASE

### Timid EU ministers shirk tough restrictions on mercury devices

**(Brussels, 20 April 2007)** - EU ministers at the Justice & Internal Affairs Council yesterday adopted a common position on restrictions to mercury-containing measuring devices. The position avoided including some mercury-intensive instruments for healthcare, which disappointed health and environment NGOs, who have called for blood pressure instruments and barometers to be immediately included. "Sadly, the Council lacked the nerve to take a decisive step in favour of safer measuring devices", said Elena Lymberidi, Zero Mercury Project Coordinator at the European Environmental Bureau. "They have shied away from ordering existing, safer alternatives and safer technology to be used for some important devices, which can present a serious risk of mercury contamination when they break or are disposed of."

Anti-mercury NGOs believe the Council has ducked the issue by avoiding any immediate restriction on specific professional healthcare equipment, like blood pressure instruments. The Council has instead sought a report from the European Commission about alternatives to these instruments, which is to be issued two years after the remaining restrictions on thermometers have gone into effect. "This is better than the Commission's initial proposal, but it's not enough" said Lisette van Vliet, of Health Care Without Harm Europe. "Mercury-free blood pressure devices are widely available commercially, are approved by recognised professional bodies and already used in European hospitals, even for difficult diagnoses".

On barometers, the Council undercut the Commission's proposal, by allowing two years' grace for manufacturers to continue using mercury. "It's plainly irresponsible to continue making new barometers that contain mercury", said Elena Lymberidi, "Aside from the enormous health and environmental risks when barometers break, (and barometers use nearly a thousand times more mercury than thermometers), it's a pointless delay. Europe's few barometer makers generally already make mercury-free barometers, along with many other types of measuring instruments. Immediately banning mercury barometers simply doesn't threaten their business! <sup>1</sup>"

The NGOs are now calling on the European Parliament to restrict mercury use in all measuring and control equipment as soon as possible when re-examining the legislative proposal in its second reading.

#### For more information:-

Elena Lymberidi, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Tel +32 2 2891301

Lisette van Vliet, Health Care Without Harm Europe, Tel: +32 2 234 3645

#### Note to journalists

See also letter sent to the Members of the Competitiveness Council, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006.  
[http://www.zeromercury.org/EU\\_developments/061201NGOs\\_Letter\\_to\\_Comp\\_Min\\_EquipDir.pdf](http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/061201NGOs_Letter_to_Comp_Min_EquipDir.pdf)

Mercury, particularly in the form of methylmercury, and even in relatively low doses, can have serious adverse neurodevelopmental impacts. The effects of low-dose exposure on children's mental development is analysed in [Grandjean, P, Landrigan P J, Developmental neurotoxicity of industrial chemicals", The Lancet, 8 Nov. 2006](#) available at <http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/06t19094page.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.barometerworld.co.uk/default.htm> (UK), <http://www.comitti.com/> (UK), <http://www.russell-scientific.co.uk/> (UK), <http://www.barometers.com/index.htm> (Belgium), <http://www.rosebarometers.nl>