



PRESS RELEASE

On course for full EU mercury export ban

(Brussels, 26 March 2008) - Environmental and health NGOsⁱ welcomed the results of the 2nd reading vote from the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) of the European Parliament on the proposed EU regulation to ban exports of mercury and safely store the surplus.

The Committee upheld the position of the Parliament's first reading last June supporting a full export ban of metallic mercury, cinnabar ore, all mercury compounds and those mercury-containing products which are banned from sale in the EU, as well as an import ban, by December 2010. However, although the Committee repeated their preference for temporary storage, they unfortunately opened the door for permanent underground disposal of liquid mercury. Nevertheless, any technological developments in transforming liquid mercury into a solid compound must now be considered before such wastes can be accepted for disposal into adapted underground facilities.

"We are happy to see that, overall, ENVI held their position from Parliament's first reading last June", said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, EEB's Project Coordinator of the Zero Mercury Campaign. "In our view temporary storage is still on the table .and is our preferred option. Long term safety for people and the environment should be the first priority when deciding how to handle such a highly toxic substance."

In addition, the Committee reiterated its position that mercury containing products forbidden in Europe are to be included in the export ban. *"Avoiding such a double standard is a must, "said Lisette van Vliet of Health Care Without Harm Europe. How can we ask other countries to stop using mercury if we still send them devices full of this toxic liquid? Besides, if we don't, we only end up hurting ourselves: the contamination comes back to us, especially in fish, and poisons our health."*

The NGOs still see a problem in the date that the export ban would start, since the later it starts, the greater the risk of mercury contamination world wide. *"The EU is the frontrunner in the global debate towards a binding global agreement and this regulation has been its flag" said Mrs. Lymberidi-Settimo. "We find it ironic that the US, which until now has had a negative position in the discussions, is about to adopt a bill which will ban its mercury exports by 1 January 2010, at least a year before the EU!"*

The Environment Committee once again requested regular information from industry on the movement of all forms of mercury within and when leaving the EU, to secure better control of this toxic substance.

NGOs urge the Environment Council to close the loopholes in the scope of export ban, start it swiftly and ensure that liquid metallic mercury is only temporarily stored, while waiting for solidification technologies to be fully developed.

Editor's notes:-

See full position paper as sent to the Environment committee of the European Parliament, 17 March 2008,

http://www.eeb.org/publication/documents/080317_NGOsLettertoENVI-2ndRead-Hg-export-ban.pdf

Mercury is a global pollutant that travels long distances. Its most toxic form – methylmercury - accumulates in large predatory fish and is taken up in our bodies through eating fish, with the worst impacts on babies in utero and small children. For more information, see Zero Mercury Campaign, www.zeromercury.org and “Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury” <http://www.env-health.org/r/145>

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ⁱ Environmental NGOS include

The **European Environmental Bureau, (EEB)**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens' organisations based in EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. The aim of the EEB is to protect and improve the environment of Europe and to enable the citizens of Europe to play their part in achieving that goal.

The **Zero Mercury Working group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of more than 40 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 by the EEB and the Mercury Policy Project/Ban Mercury Working Group. The aim of the group is to reach “Zero’ emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, towards eliminating mercury in the environment at EU level and globally.”

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), <http://www.env-health.org> is an international non-governmental organisation advocating environmental protection as a means to improving health and well-being. Member groups and organisations represent health, environment, women, health professionals and others. The group has a diverse membership of 41 member groups (6 international organisations, 11 European networks and 24 national/local organizations) including non-governmental organisations, professional bodies representative of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, academic institutions and other not-for-profit organisations.

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH), www.noharm.org, is an international coalition of hospitals and health care systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, environmental and religious organisations. HCWH is dedicated to transforming the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment.