



4 March 2009

PRESS RELEASE

World Governments Support Breakthrough Agreement on Mercury

Beyond expectations, the environmental ministers of 140 countries gathered in Nairobi, Kenya for the 25th UNEP Council meeting (20 February 2009), agreed to begin negotiating a treaty to control global mercury pollution.

Mercury and its compounds are highly toxic to humans, ecosystems and wildlife. Exposure to high concentrations of mercury and its compounds can be fatal to humans or exposure to low concentrations can cause adverse effects to the development of the neurological system, and have recently been linked to possible harmful effects on the cardiovascular, immune and reproductive systems.

Mercury is released by natural sources (e.g. volcanoes, forest fires, etc.) or anthropogenic activities, such as the generation of electricity from power plants that use coal, the extraction of gold and silver (for centuries now), or chlor-alkali production (as a cathode), etc. Furthermore, mercury is available on the world market in dental amalgam fillings, pharmaceutical antiseptics, soaps and creams, batteries, thermometers, barometers, thermostats, fluorescent lamps, etc.



It is well known that mercury has no respect for national or regional boundaries, travelling long distances through the atmosphere, and has contaminated both the European and global food supplies at levels posing a significant risk to the environment and human health. In the aquatic environment mercury bio-concentrates in fish and through the food chain it ends up on our plate posing risks especially for young children and embryos.

With about half of the world's mercury resources located in the Mediterranean region, the Mediterranean countries are facing the serious problem of increased mercury emissions, endangering human health and the environment.

The new treaty for the control of global mercury emissions will include actions to reduce: mercury supply, its use in products and processes and overall atmospheric mercury emissions, which will ultimately reduce human and environmental exposure globally. The preparations for the negotiations on the global treaty will start in 2009 and will be completed by 2013.

The new agreement was made possible by the dramatic shift in the U.S. position due to the recently elected president Barack H. Obama.

For further information, contact:

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See also the following links:

<http://www.zeromercury.org>
<http://www.eeb.org>

More information about mercury-related policies and regulations:

Gerrit H Vonkeman, Iain Thornton, Michael J. Scoullos, Mercury, Cadmium, Lead. Handbook for Sustainable Heavy Metals, Policy and Regulation. Kluwer Academic Publishers Group Date, 2001.

