

For Immediate Release
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Obama's Mercury Export Ban Bill Marked-up in Senate EPW Committee Today; Environmentalists, States and Industry Support Substitute Bill

Washington, DC— The Mercury Market Minimization Act, S. 906, (substitute), is scheduled to be marked up today at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Environment & Public Works Committee. The legislation would prohibit the sale of mercury by the U.S. government, ban exports of elemental mercury starting in 2010, establish a process for storing surplus mercury— and is supported by environmental, industry and state groups.

“Trading mercury is not like trading potato chips,” said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project. “While we spend millions of dollars in the U.S. collecting mercury, ironically it is then sold overseas and used in highly dispersive and dangerous ways, such as in small scale gold mining. Released from these practices, it circulates in the global environment and ends up in the fish that Americans eat.”

The free trade of mercury and mercury compounds on the world market, at relatively low prices and in ready supply, encourages the continued use of mercury outside of the U.S.

“We applaud Senator Barak Obama's leadership on this bipartisan legislation,” said Bender. “We've got to stop this circle of poison, where for example over 1000 tons of mercury are used annually by more than 10 million small scale gold miners in 50 developing countries, exposing themselves, their families and the local and global environment to this deadly neurotoxin.”

Mercury pollution is a transboundary pollutant, depositing locally, regionally, and globally, and affecting water bodies near industrial sources and remote areas.

Lawmakers came up with the plan to have the Department of Energy accept the liquid metal for storage after they consulted with the industry organizations, including the American Chemistry Council, National Mining Association and The Chlorine Institute; environmentalists, including NRDC and MPP; and ECOS, a coalition of states' top environmental regulators.

While similar versions of the bill were introduced in the House (H.R. 1534) by Tom Allen (D-ME), and Senate (S.906) by Senators Obama (D-IL) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), the groups are urging passage of the substitute House-passed version, since it was the subject of subsequent negotiation and compromise, and more accurately reflects the current state of development on this issue.

The amended House version of the bill would require DOE to facilitate the storage of mercury from the mining industry and from chlor-alkali plants that used mercury cells. However, it would also allow DOE to charge companies a fee for storing their mercury.

Mercury and mercury compounds are highly toxic to humans, ecosystems, and wildlife. The most significant source of mercury exposure to people in the U.S. is ingestion of mercury-contaminated fish. As many as 10 percent of women of childbearing age in the U.S. have mercury in their blood at a level that could put a baby at risk.

For more information:

[http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?
FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=69bb64bf-802a-23ad-4b89-26850f0bc7f4](http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Hearings.Hearing&Hearing_ID=69bb64bf-802a-23ad-4b89-26850f0bc7f4)

http://obama.senate.gov/press/070315-obama_murkowski/

<http://www.mercurypolicy.org/new/documents/OverviewAndBackgroundOnHR1534.pdf>

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/064-29478-140-05-21-911-20080520IPR29477-19-05-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

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