



**Mercury
Policy Project**



PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. Joins EU in Banning Mercury Exports

Environmentalists applaud bi-partisan effort

The U.S. has joined the European Union in setting a date certain to ban their mercury exports, thereby reducing the supply of commodity mercury into the world market. Environmental groups in the U.S. and around the world applauded the broad bi-partisan support of the legislation, which was introduced by Senators Barack Obama (D-IL) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) in the Senate, and in the House by Representative Tom Allen (D-ME),.

"Neither mercury nor the fish we eat recognizes federal boundaries," Linda Greer, Director of the Health Program at NRDC, said. "Passage of this legislation banning the export of mercury is a great victory for the health of people in America and all over the world. It will curb the flow of mercury into global commerce, keeping it out of our tuna and other fish."

In independent actions taken in late September, the EU adopted a mercury export ban that takes effect in 2011, while earlier this month Congress passed legislation to ban U.S. mercury exports by 2013. U.S. President George Bush signed the legislation into law yesterday.

"Combined with a similar ban adopted just last month by the European Union, this new U.S. law will significantly reduce the amount of mercury use and pollution in the developing world," said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, Project Coordinator of the European Environmental Bureau's Zero Mercury Campaign.

The Mercury Export Ban Act, S. 906, also prohibits the sale of mercury by the U.S. government, prohibits the transfer of elemental mercury by Federal agencies and requires the Department of Energy (DOE) to designate and manage an elemental mercury long-term disposal facility.

The U.S. and the EU are among the top exporters of commodity mercury. Between 40 and 50% of the estimated 3,800 metric tons of annual global trade in mercury passes through the EU and the U.S. Neither the U.S. nor the EU mines mercury anymore. Instead, most mercury supplies come from recycling of mercury products such as thermostats, as well as decommissioned mercury-cell chlor-alkali plants. Excess mercury is sold on the world market by commodity brokers.

"Trading mercury is not like trading potato chips," said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project. "We've got to stop this circle of poison, where over 1000 tons of mercury are used by 15 million gold miners in 50 developing countries, exposing themselves, the global environment and the world's fish supply to this dangerous neurotoxin. With export bans passed in the EU and now the U.S., momentum is building a global mercury trade ban."

Gold-mining sites are extensively contaminated with mercury around the globe. Airborne mercury is also a transcontinental pollutant that ends in waterways, contaminating fish that end up on dinner tables the world over.

“We are optimistic that the global community is well on its way towards establishing a treaty to control mercury trade and pollution, and effectively safeguard the fish we eat from this poison,” said Richard Gutierrez, of the Philippine NGO, Ban Toxics.

Lawmakers came up with the plan to have DOE 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; environmental groups; and ECOS, a coalition of states’ top environmental regulators.

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For More Information:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/10/20081014-9.html>

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1399&format>

<http://www.iisd.ca/chemical/merc2/>

<http://www.mercurypolicy.org>

The **Natural Resources Defense Council** is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing. More information on NRDC is available at its Web site: www.nrdc.org.

The **European Environmental Bureau**, www.eeb.org, is a federation of more than 140 environmental citizens’ organisations based in all EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. These organisations range from local and national, to European and international. 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 **Mercury Policy Project** works to promote policies to eliminate mercury uses, reduce the export and trafficking of mercury, and significantly reduce mercury exposures at the local, national, and international levels. We strive to work harmoniously with other groups and individuals who have similar goals and interests. More information is available on our website at: www.mercurypolicy.org.

The **Zero Mercury Working Group**, www.zeromercury.org, is an international coalition of more than 56 public interest non-governmental organizations from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau 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.”