



PRESS RELEASE

A healthy advance: European Parliament edges closer to eliminating mercury in the health sector

[Brussels, 14 September 2006] Health and environment NGOsⁱ welcome the European Parliament's Environment Committee's vote yesterday supporting a ban on measuring devices containing mercury, including those used in hospitals and doctors' surgeries. "The Committee have very sensibly held fast to their position on the EU's Strategy on Mercury regarding healthcare devices", said Elena Lymberidi, of the European Environmental Bureau. "As long as the full Parliament votes for this position at the next stage of the legislative procedure, the public and our environment will be better protected from the scourge of mercury."

The NGOs congratulate the Committee for its report which proposes a ban on mercury-containing instruments such as fever thermometers and blood pressure devices both for the public and professional healthcare facilities. "This is potentially great news for the general public, patients, medical staff and the environment", said Karolina Ruzickova, from Health Care Without Harm Europe "If this ban becomes law, mercury exposure risks in healthcare can be dramatically reduced."

Ample high quality alternatives for both fever thermometers and blood pressure instruments can already be bought in Europe. "Although some exceptions for professional blood pressure instruments may still be allowed, this ban can bring us a long way in eliminating unnecessary and highly risky use of mercury", said Lisette van Vliet, Toxics Policy Advisor for the European Public Health Alliance Environment Network. "Mercury contamination from blood pressure instruments in and from hospitals is still a big problem. We hope that mercury-free alternatives are carefully considered when exemptions are permitted".

However, the NGOs criticise the Committee's position on small barometers, which overturns the Commission's earlier proposal to ban all barometers for public sale regardless of size. The manufacture of small barometers may now continue, even though these instruments pose a great risk of contamination and severe harm to health if they break, particularly in people's homes. The cost of cleaning up mercury contamination can also be high.

Anti-mercury NGOs now call on the all Members of the European Parliament at the Plenary vote in late October and on the EU Member States at the Council meeting in December to follow the line set by the Environment Committee on medical devices, non-fever thermometers and manometers, but to follow the Commission's proposal on small barometers.

For more information:-

Elena Lymberidi, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Tel +32 2 289 1301,

Karolina Ruzickova, Health Care Without Harm Europe, Tel: +420 222 782 808

Lisette van Vliet, EPHA Environment Network (EEN), Tel: +32 2 234 3645

www.zeromercury.org; www.env-health.org; www.noharm.org

See also letter sent to the Members of the Environment Committee:

http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/060912NGOs_key_demands_MeasControl_Equip_dir_ENVI.pdf

ⁱ Environmental and Health NGOS include:

The **European Environmental Bureau** (EEB) www.eeb.org, is a federation of over 145 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 **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 2006 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."

European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN) <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 organisations) 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 healthcare systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, environmental and religious organisations. HCWH is dedicated to transforming the healthcare 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.

Also supported by NGOs from the USA (Natural Resources Defence Council), India (Toxics Link), China (Global Village of Beijing), Brazil (Association for Combats against the POPS).