



**United Nations  
Environment  
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**Ad hoc open-ended working group to  
prepare for the intergovernmental  
negotiating committee on mercury**  
Bangkok, 19–23 October 2009  
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Preparations for the work of the intergovernmental negotiating  
committee to prepare a global legally binding instrument on  
mercury: information that might assist the work of the  
intergovernmental negotiating committee**

## **Report on activities related to mercury supply and the environmentally sound storage of mercury**

### **Note by the secretariat**

1. By its decision 25/5 III, the Governing Council called upon the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), coordinating as appropriate with Governments, intergovernmental organizations, stakeholders and the Global Mercury Partnership, subject to the availability of resources and concurrently with the work of the intergovernmental negotiating committee, to continue and enhance, as part of the international action on mercury, existing work in a number of areas, including enhancing capacity for mercury storage and reducing the supply of mercury from, for example, primary mercury mining.
2. The present note describes current activities related to mercury supply and storage for the information of participants in the current meeting.

### **I. Proposed partnership area on supply and storage**

3. During the meeting of the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership Advisory Group held in Geneva from 31 March to 2 April 2009, the importance of mercury supply and storage was acknowledged. At that time, the member representing the Zero Mercury Working Group indicated the Group's willingness to act as interim lead on mercury supply and storage issues. The Partnership Advisory Group accepted the offer with thanks.
4. A business plan has been drafted for the partnership area and circulated to partners and other stakeholders for input. The partnership area's objective is to contribute to the minimization and, where feasible, elimination of mercury supply, considering a hierarchy of sources, and the retirement of

\* UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/WG.Prep/1/1.

mercury from the market as a result of environmentally sound management. It recognizes that mercury supply and trade are priority areas for the intergovernmental negotiating committee and aims to halve the global supply of mercury by 2013.

## II. Supply activities

5. The Government of Kyrgyzstan operates the last remaining primary mercury mine known to export mercury globally. The mine is located in Khaidarkan in the Ferghana Valley and is estimated to produce 300–350 tons of mercury per annum. Kyrgyzstan's contribution to global mercury supply over many years has been important but not indispensable. Action to assist Kyrgyzstan in moving away from primary mercury mining has been recognized as a priority by the international community.

6. Technical, social and economic assessment reports and a national action plan were initiated with the assistance of funding from the Governments of Switzerland and the United States of America in late 2007 and implemented jointly by UNEP and the United National Institute for Training and Research. At the national level, the project is led by the State Agency of Environmental Protection and Forestry in cooperation with other government agencies and stakeholders through the inter-ministerial working group established for this purpose.

7. Further support will be required to assist Kyrgyzstan in any future transition process. UNEP will be hosting an international forum on this topic on Sunday, 18 October 2009, immediately prior to the current meeting to inform the international community about options in moving forward. Further information is available at the secretariat's website.<sup>1</sup>

## III. UNEP mercury storage projects

8. The Chemicals Branch of the Division of Technology, Industry and Economics has initiated mercury storage projects in Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, supported by the Government of Norway. These projects are aimed at reducing the eventual release of mercury to the biosphere by initiating a regional process that will support the sequestration of excess mercury in these regions, thereby preventing its re-entry into the global marketplace. More information about the projects can be found at the secretariat's website.<sup>2</sup>

9. During the project inception workshops, options for safe, long-term storage solutions were presented to Governments and interested stakeholders. Options included above-ground storage facilities (such as warehouses), underground storage facilities or salt mines and export to foreign facilities. Governments in both regions agreed to proceed with an options analysis and feasibility study that would investigate the three options with due consideration of a broad range of criteria (technological, social, political, environmental and health impacts, economic and financial viability, among others). Experience gained in the United States with an above-ground warehouse facility and in the European Union with an underground geological formation facility was considered valuable in assessing the available options. In addition, the study by the European Commission on mercury stabilization and waste acceptance criteria in relation to current legislation will provide useful information on the need to pre-treat elemental mercury before eventual storage.

10. Executive committees for both regions have been established. These have an advisory role for the project, and will catalyse policy development consistent with the development of a long-term safe terminal storage facility or facilities. The need for additional legislation and regulatory measures at the national level such as those related to mercury trade and demand was recognized as one of the committees' urgent tasks.

11. The "Assessment Report for Excess Mercury Supply in Asia 2010–50" presented two scenarios for Asia. The first indicated an approximate supply-demand equilibrium in 2017, with a need to store 5,500 tons of mercury. The second indicated that excess Asian mercury appeared from around 2027, with a need to store 7,500 tons of mercury. The full report is available at the secretariat's website.<sup>3</sup>

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1 [www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/Sector-Specific-Information/supply\\_and\\_storage.htm](http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/Sector-Specific-Information/supply_and_storage.htm)

2 [http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/storage/main\\_page.htm](http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/storage/main_page.htm)

3 <http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/>

12. The “Assessment Report for Excess Mercury Supply in Latin America and the Caribbean 2010-50” also presented two scenarios, with the first resulting in a supply-demand equilibrium in 2013 with an accumulated excess of over 8,000 tons of mercury from 2013 to 2050. The second resulted in a supply-demand equilibrium in around 2019 with an accumulated excess of more than 2,000 tonnes of mercury from 2019 to 2050, in addition to possibly 5,000 tonnes produced as a by-product of industrial gold mining. The complete report is available at the above-mentioned website.

#### **A. Issues raised in regional consultations**

13. Most Asian and Pacific Governments confirmed that initiating storage activities in the region could contribute to demand reduction and that they were willing to consider the option of storage. Of the criteria to be considered in the selection of management options, participants were most concerned with the social and political acceptability of the infrastructure and the need to elevate the issue to a high ministerial body such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Of equal priority were the issues of public health and safety and environmental impacts. Concerns were also raised as to ownership of the mercury surplus, the need for pre-treatment or stabilization before storage and the preference for a centralized regional facility rather than smaller national facilities. Operating and maintenance costs for the facility were also a major consideration. Moreover, site-specific requirements such as the regional geology, hydrology and susceptibility to natural disasters were major concerns. The polluter pays principle was invoked as the guiding principle in storage activities. There was agreement that a global treaty embodying specific policies for terminal storage would ensure consistent and sustained national government policy.

14. One major concern that Latin American and Caribbean Governments expressed was the need to deal with end-of-life mercury-containing products. Interim national storage facilities were needed, such as in health facilities for those products in the health-care sector. The need to have public hearings to obtain community support during an environmental impact assessment of a facility was considered essential. There would be a need to develop extraction technologies for elemental mercury and technologies to convert mercury compounds into their elemental forms. The region must also manage mercury from decommissioned chlor-alkali plants and by-products of mining. With limited funds in developing countries to deal with mercury storage, there was a proposal to tackle elemental mercury as part of an overall hazardous waste management programme.

#### **B. Identifying the next steps**

15. Results from the options analysis for the safe long-term storage of mercury in Asia and the Pacific region pointed to political, legal, technical, economic, social, health and environmental issues that must be dealt with in a coherent manner before a site or sites could be selected. Potential sites are being put forward based on the analysis. There is a need for legislative and regulatory measures at both the national and regional levels that would facilitate and be consistent with the establishment of safe, long-term storage facilities. For Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a need to follow up the options analysis, which will be the basis for the choice of preferred option by Governments.

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