



#OECDchem

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MERCURY



Programme



Global Forum on Environment:

Working towards the elimination of mercury and reducing its harmful impacts to human health and the environment



Introduction

Mercury (Hg) and its compounds are well-known pollutants that affect human health and the environment over many years. The most significant anthropogenic releases of mercury globally are through emissions to air, as well as releases from various sources directly to water and land. Sector-wise, artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is considered to be the largest source of mercury emission, which is followed closely by coal combustion, primary non-ferrous metal production, and cement-clinker production. These sectors are also major contributors of the global anthropogenic releases of mercury to aquatic systems. Overall emissions of mercury and its compounds to air from industrial installations drastically reduced over the years due to global actions such as the United Nations Minamata Convention on Mercury, however, its emissions and releases to the environment are still a global concern.

Regardless of the efforts put into working towards eliminating mercury and its compounds from the value chain, mercury use continues to exist in different forms. The ASGM and vinyl chloride monomer (VCM) production still account for over 60 percent of global mercury consumption. Beyond the industrial uses of mercury, there are many daily-used products containing mercury, such as batteries, pesticides, medical devices and cosmetics. Some of these products production and use, such as skin whitening creams and thermometers, have decreased significantly in developed countries over the past decades; however, other countries maintain their availability in the market. And mercury-in-products are not only direct sources of exposure but also contribute to mercury emissions and releases due to their production and poor waste management practices.

In some countries, legal mercury imports for registered uses such as dental amalgams are below the estimates of mercury consumption, which indicates that there are illicit mercury trade flows. Therefore, trade and economic solutions for better regulating the flows of mercury are critical to reducing registered mercury use and its way into illegal uses. Due diligence processes in supply chains play an important role in preventing and governing illicit trade of mercury-added products. Above the responsibilities of the industry partners, international and regional cooperation is needed to ensure a formalised and unified action against the illegal trade of mercury and mercury-added products.

The Global Forum on Environment on Mercury brings together leading actors in the field of chemicals and waste management of mercury to promote effective engagement, collaboration and action on eliminating or reducing mercury from the supply chain. This includes regulators and policy makers in charge of chemical safety in OECD Member and Partner governments, in particular those that are responsible for implementing the Minamata Convention on Mercury in their country, as well as relevant stakeholders from International Governmental Organisations, private industry organisations and companies, civil society, philanthropies and more.

The event will enable participants to:

- exchange experiences on common challenges in implementing and enforcing the Minamata Convention on Mercury between countries, the global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the effects of mercury;
- discuss innovative solutions and best practices to eliminate mercury from the value chains.

The Global Forum will also:

- raise awareness of stakeholders on the harmful impacts of mercury on human health and the environment and possible solutions to them;
- promote new economic tools developed by the OECD and other IGOs to implement these solutions;
- contribute to the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the new UN framework on the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.

Draft Programme

Opening Session

Session 1 - Keynote speeches: Issues and challenges

1. The sources of man-made emissions and releases of mercury and impacts on health and environment

- What are the main sources of exposure to mercury to air, water, soil and due to anthropogenic activities (artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), mercury-in-products, e.g. skin lightening creams) in developed and developing countries and what are the priority areas for action? What are the priorities under the Minamata Convention Initial Assessments (MIAs) and the Minamata ASGM National Action Plans?
- What are the main flows of both legal and illegal mercury?
- What control measures are enforced during the flow of mercury?

2. Socio-economic impacts of mercury, including on human rights

3. The Minamata Convention: a big step forward but implementation and enforcement will be key

- What are the challenges of the Parties in implementing and enforcing the Convention (based on the [Minamata Initial Assessments pursuant to article 21](#) of the Convention)?
- What are the common challenges of the Parties noted in the Minamata ASGM National Action Plans pursuant to Article 7.3 of the Convention ?
- What are the best practices implemented by Parties that were effective in implementing and enforcing the Convention?

Session 2 - Presentations and panel discussion: The solutions reducing or where feasible eliminating mercury from the value chains

2.1. Illegal and illicit activities related to mercury and mercury-added products

2.1.1. Role of cooperation in fighting ongoing trade of illegal mercury and mercury-added products and misuse of legal products

Registered uses of mercury and mercury-added products may be misused for other processes. This session aims to highlight the importance of cooperation at the bilateral, regional and international levels to prevent illegal trade and misuse of legal mercury and mercury-added products.

- What is the role of regional and bilateral cooperation in identifying illegal products and in law enforcement?

2.1.2. Trade solutions

The global movement of mercury and mercury-added products for legal purposes requires stringent trade agreements with good monitoring practices exercised between countries. The objective of this session is to identify solutions for improving trade agreements, misuses of legal mercury-added products, and tracking technologies used in trade.

- What is the role of regional trade agreements, and good governance of free-trade zones?
- How to avoid misuse of legal products (e.g. mercury imported for dental amalgam used What is the role of HS codes and other tools for tracking trade in mercury and mercury-added products?

2.2. Public and civil society actions

A “bottom-up” approach to tackling the global action on eliminating or reducing mercury from the value chains may initiate a more rooted solution. During this session, the panelists will discuss the importance of the public and civil society actions in the demand and availability of mercury in ASGM and mercury-added products.

- What is the role of public procurement as a lever for action?
- What is the impact of national and regional policies in reducing the demand and availability of mercury-added products?
- What is the role of civil society and consumers’ associations and of education and training in reducing the demand for mercury (e.g. skin-lightening creams)?

2.3. Due diligence in gold and mercury supply chains

Due diligence practices benefit mutually to governments and private companies by informing them about risks associated with their activities. Panel members will share their experiences in due diligence activities carried-out for the ASGM and mercury-added products in the supply chain, particularly focusing on cosmetics. In addition, possible ways of incorporating mercury-free technologies within the gold and mercury supply chains will be discussed.

- How can private companies identify environmental risks? How to incentivize private sector-led due diligence in legal gold and mercury supply chains?
- How to promote the adoption of mercury free technologies (e.g. for ASGM and/or mercury-added processes)?

2.4. Economic solutions: economic incentives and financing

During this session, panel members will share experiences and propose possible solutions of economic incentives for mercury-free practices for both companies, and miners whose income is currently dependent on using mercury. For example, after the intended use of mercury, mercury-containing waste requires proper management to prevent its return either to illegal use or to the environment.

- What are economic instruments, including incentives to accelerate the uptake/development of alternatives, as well as disincentives to conducting “business as usual” and for offsetting damage?
- How to improve access to financing for mercury-free products and processes, e.g. for miners working in ASGM?
- How to stop (or discourage) the financing of harmful practice? How to convince policy makers to reduce and stop incentives to industries and activities that release or emit mercury, or that use products whose manufacturing processes are dependent on the use of mercury? How to raise awareness of financial institutions and corporations? How to include natural capital assets in the balance sheets of businesses and the public sector?

- o Example case: how financing can be distributed to miners through gold supply chains, as part of supply chain due diligence risk mitigation efforts?
- How to increase sustainable financing for mercury waste management ?
 - o Example case: Mercury containing tailings after ASGM
- How can sustainable mercury waste management practices be enforced (e.g. avoiding mercury-containing waste making its way into global trade)?
 - o Example case: Decommissioned chlor-alkali facilities

Session 3 - Conclusion panel: How to foster international cooperation and public/private partnership for mercury-free supply chains? How to monitor progress?

The objective of this final session is to identify the best practices for (i) cooperation to eliminate or reduce the availability of mercury or mercury-added products in the global supply chain, and (ii) ways for other sectors to benefit from these possible solutions.

- What are lessons learned from partnerships (e.g. UNEP Global Mercury Partnership)?
- What are the lessons learned from other areas than the sectors discussed at this Forum (e.g. [Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero on climate change](#))?
- Which other industrial areas using or emitting mercury can benefit from fostering international cooperation and public/private partnership? How can the global supply chain involving mercury be made more transparent?
- How to have an integrated approach to leverage investments and supply chain investments to address the triple challenge – climate change, biodiversity and pollution?

Session 4 - Closing session

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