



PRESS RELEASE

Setback for health: EU Parliament shirks banishing mercury from measuring devices

(Brussels, 14 November 2006) Anti-mercury health and environment NGOsⁱ strongly deplore today's vote by the European Parliament, delaying restrictions on measuring devices containing mercury, such as barometers and thermometers. "Sadly, Parliament has yielded to pressure from a small group of barometer makers", said Elena Lymberidi, Zero Mercury Project Coordinator at the European Environmental Bureau. "MEPs have allowed the whims of a tiny market sector to trample the much wider imperative of protecting people's health and the environment. We will call upon the Commission and Council to reject Parliament's position."

The NGOs see making new barometers which contain mercury as irresponsible. The alternative of controlling their manufacture does not prevent the danger from breaks or leaks that exists during the instrument's entire lifespan.

"This is a deeply disappointing outcome", said a representative from Health & Environment Alliance. "Dozens of tonnes will continue to enter the market and endanger people's health and the environment, especially during leakage and breakage", said Karolina Ruzickova, from Health Care Without Harm Europe.

The NGOs condemned Parliament's vote, which waives earlier moves to restrict mercury-containing devices for consumer and healthcare use. Now a first reading agreement for a quick adoption of the directive cannot be reached and this means that very likely the whole issue will have to be brought under the REACH legislation. Because after REACH is adopted, a ban on mercury in specific applications will need to pass through the REACH legal procedures, leading to a serious delay of a possible ban. Meanwhile, many hundreds of those devices will break and leak and contaminate the environment. "Parliament has foolishly missed a vital and immediate opportunity to continue the steady progress towards totally removing mercury from measuring devices, although mercury-free alternatives are currently available. As a result, consumers, health workers, patients and the environment remain exposed to this source of mercury contamination", said Lisette van Vliet, from Health and Environment Alliance.

The NGOs now call on the Commission to swiftly propose measures as soon as the 'REACH' chemicals law is adopted to reduce mercury contamination as quickly as possible.

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See also letter sent to the Members of the European Parliament:

http://www.zeromercury.org/EU_developments/131106NGOsLetterLimitationsPlenary.pdf

ⁱ Health and Environmental NGOs include:

Health and Environment Alliance, <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 organizations) 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 health care systems, medical and nursing professionals, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, environmental and religious organisations. HCWH is dedicated to transforming the health care 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.

The **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**, 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 **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 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.”

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), South Africa (groundWork).