

October 17, 2007

*Beijing, Buenos Aires, Durban, San Francisco*-- Health Care Without Harm today released a new report, *The Global Movement for Mercury Free Health Care*.

It can be found on the Health Care Without Harm website:

<http://www.noharm.org/globalsoutheng/mercury-report-download>

The report documents how health care systems around the world are substituting mercury-based medical devices with safer alternatives, thereby protecting health care workers, patients and the global environment.

As report co-author Joshua Karliner explains, “there is a growing groundswell around mercury-free health care—not only in the US and Europe, which have virtually phased out mercury thermometers—but also in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.”

The report contains a number of colorful examples of health care professionals, government officials and non-governmental organizations in developing countries working to phase-out mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices from hospitals and clinics.

It also highlights a series of model policies that are emerging for large cities, national governments, states and provinces in countries such as Argentina, South Africa, India and the Philippines.

“We are reaching a tipping point,” says report co-author Jamie Harvie. “It is now possible that we can virtually phase mercury out of health care within the next decade.”

The report is being released on the eve of the Southern Africa Conference on Mercury Free Health Care, the third in a series of four regional events Health Care Without Harm is organizing in association with the UN Environment Programme (see [www.mercuryfreehealthcare.org](http://www.mercuryfreehealthcare.org)).

**Some of the report’s findings include:**

- The health care sector is a key source of global mercury demand and emissions.
- Mercury waste from broken fever thermometers is significant. For instance, thermometers used and broken in Argentina’s health care sector emit an estimated 1 metric ton of mercury per year. The estimate for Mexico is similar. For India, it is 2.4 metric tons.
- The mercury-based medical device industry is a major polluter. In China, which produces more than 150 million mercury thermometers per-year, more than 27 metric tons of mercury are lost to the environment before the devices ever leave the factory.

- Peer reviewed literature from the last decade shows that digital thermometers and aneroid sphygmomanometers are just as accurate as mercury-based devices.
- In Argentina, Brazil, Europe, Mexico, South Africa and the United States, health care systems are breaking even or saving money by switching to non-mercury devices.
- Hundreds, if not thousands of hospitals and health care systems throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America are already going mercury-free.
- If the right political and economic forces converge, the day is not far off when, in most hospitals around the world, mercury based-medical devices will be a thing of the past.
- Health care leaders can be key spokespeople and advocates for mercury elimination and environmental health—not just in hospitals--but throughout our societies.

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