

“Global Partnership for Mercury Management in Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining”

June 15, 2005
Washington, D.C.
The United States

Open invitation for Partners and Participants

With the findings of the 2002 “United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) [Global Mercury Assessment](#)” report, UNEP became a global leader for coordinating international efforts to reduce the use and release of mercury and its compounds. UNEP, in collaboration with many prominent international organizations, has been pivotal in raising global awareness about the environmental and health issues associated with mercury releases and uses, and has initiated activities designed to build a strong foundation for international mercury reduction efforts.

Building on that strong foundation established by the [UNEP Mercury Program](#), a wide range of activities are necessary to address the global mercury issue. Paragraph 27 of the [decision 23/9](#) adopted by [the twenty-third session of the UNEP Governing Council](#) urges governments, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organizations and the private sector to develop and implement partnerships, in a clear, transparent and accountable manner, as one approach to reducing the risks to human health and the environment from the release of mercury, thereby achieving the objectives set forth in the Annex to decision 22/4 V. The decision also invites the identification of a set of pilot partnerships by September 1, 2005.

To this end, in cooperation with UNEP, the United States will initiate discussion on a “Global Partnership for Mercury Management in Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining” that would develop and implement several sector-oriented activities involving the sharing of information, the transfer of best management practices and appropriate technologies, emission monitoring and data collection, and other methods to reduce mercury use and emissions, and worker exposures. The partnership meeting will be a side event to the Communities and Small-Scale Mining (CASM) Conference, organized by the World Bank, which is to be held in Washington, D.C. on June 16-17, 2005.

It is our hope that other stakeholders are interested in joining this “Global Partnership for Mercury Management in Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining,” and will accept this open invitation to participate in the meeting on the afternoon of June 15. A [draft agenda for this meeting](#) is also available. By focusing global mercury reduction efforts on controlling mercury use and releases in key sectors, a large portion of the global anthropogenic sources of mercury releases can be addressed more quickly, improving health and environment conditions in the near-term, both locally and globally. We recognize that interested stakeholders may not be able to attend this initial meeting of the partnership, and look forward to their participation in the months to come.

Over the course of the next several months, in addition to holding this Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining partnership meeting, we are interested in joining with other stakeholders to develop and implement partnerships in the following sectors: products, coal combustion, chloralkali facilities, and fate and transport research. In this regard, we call your attention to informal consultations on a [“Global Partnership for Mercury Reduction in Products”](#) to be held on May 25, 2005 in Portland, Maine, as well as an informal consultation on a [“Global Partnership for Mercury Reduction in the Chloralkali Sector,”](#) also to be held on May 25, 2005 in Portland, Maine.

Partners

The United States Government and the [UNEP Mercury Program](#) welcome all stakeholders to participate in this partnership. Generally, a partner is an entity who indicates a willingness to contribute either time, resources, or expertise to implement the partnership, which would be designed to advance the objectives of the 2005 [UNEP Governing Council decision 23/9](#). In our view, partners can include national, state or provincial governments, international organizations, national and international companies and trade associations, national and international healthcare organizations, national and international environmental organizations, international funding institutions, and other interested stakeholders. As partners, we would hope to work together very closely to ensure the success of this partnership by working to identify the elements and mechanisms necessary to achieve the objectives of the partnership. Current partners for this partnership include the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, the Communities and Small Scale Mining Program (CASM) Secretariat, and the United States.

The Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining Mercury Management Partnership

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining is a globally significant source of mercury releases. In the gold mining process, mercury is used to amalgamate with ore. After the amalgamation process, the mercury is often burned in an open burner, without the recapture of mercury vapor. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) estimates that 1,000 tons of mercury are released into the environment each year from this sector, a large portion of which are atmospheric emissions. In addition, large quantities of the remaining mercury-laden wastes can remain on land and in water bodies at mining sites. Better practices for safe mercury capture and reuse can reduce occupational exposures and risks in the mining communities while also achieving significant reductions in mercury releases on a global scale.

Proposed Goal of the Partnership

The Partnership would promote the reduction of global use and emissions from artisanal and small-scale gold mining through the reduction of mercury releases to air, water, or land that may occur during the gold manufacturing process. The Partnership would seek to support the existing international efforts in this area, in particular the efforts underway by the UNIDO Global Mercury Project, and increase the availability of community outreach programs to educate mining communities regarding opportunities to reduce the occupational and environmental risks associated with artisanal and small-scale gold mining.

Proposed Objectives of the Partnership

- Increase community outreach programs to educate mining communities about mercury risks and reduce occupational exposures and environmental contamination.
- Improve emissions monitoring, data collection, and reporting of mercury use in artisanal mining. Improve estimates of mercury air emissions associated with small-scale gold mining and promote their inclusion within emission inventories.
- Promote the transfer of best practices and appropriate technologies among governments, local laboratories, and miners through demonstration and introduction of cleaner, cost-effective technologies for artisanal gold extraction, such as recapture for reuse, and disseminate this information broadly.
- Provide technical support for the implementation of voluntary, cost-effective operational practices aimed at reducing air emissions of mercury from industrial gold mining, where appropriate.

Proposed Initial Actions of the Partnership

The partners could agree to work together to:

- Finalize a work plan with an identified time line for this phase of the partnership, which includes mobilizing the necessary resources to address an initial set of projects under the partnership and initiating implementation of such projects.
- Pursuant to the decision of the Governing Council, consider options for reporting procedures and evaluation of mercury reductions.
- Provide technical support for the development and implementation of a Plan of Action for Regional Cooperation on Mercury Contamination in the Amazon Basin.
- Work with UNIDO and others to launch pilot emissions reductions activities using appropriate technologies, such as hand-held retorts, including training for mining communities and baseline and post-project monitoring.
- Disseminate best practice information for mercury management through UNIDO and UNEP.
- Provide in-kind assistance to selected mining communities for field training in low-cost alternative sampling equipment to test for mercury in air, soil, water, and fish.

Next steps

Interested partners or participants should contact Marianne Bailey in the Office of International Affairs at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as soon as possible at bailey.marianne@epa.gov.

Please refer to [the provisional agenda for meeting on the “Global Partnership for Mercury for Mercury Management in Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining”](#) for further information.