

Discussion Paper
May 25, 2005
Informal Consultation on the
“Global Partnership for Mercury Reduction in Products”

The Products Partnership

Mercury has been used globally in numerous products including paints, fungicides, household appliances, electronics, batteries, automobile switches, dental amalgam, medical equipment and thermometers. While mercury use in pesticides, fungicides, paints, and most batteries has been banned or phased-out in many parts of the world, these uses are continuing in many countries. Some estimate that mercury use in batteries may comprise about one third of the global mercury use in products. Yet for most products, there are effective alternatives available that could replace mercury. The “Global Partnership for Mercury Reduction in Products” would bring together experts from around the world to share information and provide technical assistance on successful approaches for reducing or eliminating mercury in products.

Proposed Goal of the Partnership

The Partnership would promote the reduction of global use and demand for commodity-grade mercury through reduction or elimination of mercury in products, where there are effective substitutes. The Partnership would also seek to reduce global mercury releases to air, water, or land that may occur during manufacturing and industrial processes, and during the disposal or recycling of mercury-containing products and wastes.

Proposed Objectives of the Partnership

- Exchange information and expertise on the identification of mercury-added products, effective non-mercury substitutes, products (and specifications) where mercury has been significantly reduced or eliminated (e.g., batteries, thermometers, lamps), and effective regulatory or voluntary approaches to phasing out unnecessary mercury product uses or reducing mercury content of products.
- Transfer and apply best management practices for reducing releases from product manufacturing, reducing the use of mercury-containing products and their associated wastes in the health care sector, and programs for reducing or eliminating mercury and other toxic substances from the product supply chain.
- Improve mercury use inventories in countries to establish a baseline for future reductions in specific product categories (e.g., batteries, paints, thermometers).
- Better characterize the amount of mercury used in products globally, including where the products are manufactured and used, and raise public awareness of mercury-containing products and alternatives.
- Conduct assessments of technical, economic, regulatory, or other impediments to using non-mercury alternatives or reducing the amount of mercury used in products.

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, including mechanisms for 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.
- Exchange information on approaches and programs for reducing or eliminating mercury and other toxic substances from the product supply chain.
- Facilitate the transfer of successful approaches for reducing the use of mercury-containing products and their associated wastes in the health care sector.
- Provide export and import data on commodity-grade mercury to assist UNEP in the preparation of the report on global mercury flows called for in the Governing Council decision.
- Initiate pilot projects in 2005 to reduce mercury use in the manufacture of batteries, paints, fungicides, and other products in countries identified during the course of the partnership meetings as in need of assistance.

Becoming a Partner

The United States and the UNEP Mercury Program welcome all stakeholders to participate in the Global Partnership for Mercury Reduction in Products. Generally, a partner is an entity who indicates a willingness to contribute time, resources, or expertise to implement the partnership, which would be designed to advance the objectives of the 2005 UNEP Governing Council decision. 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. Interested partners or participants should contact Denise Wright in the Office of Prevention, Pollution, and Toxics at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at wright.denise@epa.gov.