

Mercury Partnerships

Background

This document outlines Guyana's status of the Governing Council Decision 23/9 IV on the mercury programme as requested by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Chemicals. This decision refers to the development and implementation of partnerships as an approach to reducing risks to human health and the environment from mercury releases. Guyana has been involved in several partnerships throughout the years, both at regional and national levels, and though they were not developed and implemented as a direct result of the GC Decision 23/9, they have similar objectives. By far, the major source of mercury contamination in Guyana is small and medium scale gold mining and almost all the efforts to reduce mercury use and contamination relates to these activities.

Regional Partnerships

Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO)

Guyana has been working with other countries of the Amazon Region through the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation in developing a strategy for the reduction of mercury contamination. This is part of a wider initiative to promote chemical safety in the Amazon Basin. This process commenced in 2004 when it was decided that a strategy should be developed and implemented to address mercury contamination in the Amazon Region. After several meetings and consultations between the countries, a Regional Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Mercury Contamination in the Amazon Ecosystems was developed. The plan focuses on proper handling of chemicals; use of clean technologies; dynamic, competitive and sustainable economic development of gold's production chain; social inclusion respecting cultural diversity; natural resources sustainability and welfare of communities. The Plan, which has several key objectives, identified five (5) programme areas for implementation which are interaction and integration among countries; institutional strengthening; environmental, social and technological management; social communication; and knowledge management.

Caribbean Region

Guyana participated in the Regional Awareness Raising Workshop on Mercury for the Caribbean Region. This was organised as one in a series of regional workshops initiated by UNEP to assist countries in understanding the nature and magnitude of the mercury problems and processes and recommend strategies to address the problems. Participants identified mercury pollution problems that are common throughout the region and the actions that can be taken regionally to deal with these problems. One of the focus of the workshop was partnerships, especially since the region consist of several small territories. Participants examined the opportunities for regional cooperation and how national and regional actions can be implemented. In addition, to support that might be needed from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to support government actions. It was recognised that the mercury pollution problem in the Caribbean Region is small when compared to the problems globally. Additionally, since the problems in individual countries are even smaller, it was necessary to have regional cooperation in addressing these issues. In addition, the problems are also similar for example improper disposal of mercury contaminated waste. It was suggested that regional treatment and disposal facilities may be required. It was also recommended that regional bodies such as the Basel Regional Centre, CARICOM, Caribbean Environmental Health Institute and the University of the West Indies should play more integral role in assisting to reduce the mercury pollution problems. At this workshop it was agreed that partnership is necessary to address mercury problems in the Caribbean Region.

Guiana Shield

The countries of the Guiana Shield – Guyana, Suriname and French are collaborating on reducing the impacts of small and medium scale mining on the environment with mercury contamination being one of the major areas. These efforts are supported by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Several stakeholders are involved including government agencies, the gold miners and other important stakeholders in the Guianas. It is hoped that the necessary legislative and institutional capacity would be developed such as policy, regulations, guidelines, monitoring and enforcement to ensure that gold mining activities can contribute to socio-economic development of the Guianas, without destroying the resource base, including human population, of this biologically diverse and rich region. A number of

workshops were held such as the one in French Guiana in 2005 where seven (7) representatives from Guyana attended on the Use of Mercury Free Technologies in Mining. Several demonstrations projects and panel discussions were conducted. WWF has also prepared and publicise a public awareness video in the impact of mining in the Guianas.

National Partnerships

GENCAPD

The Guyana Environmental Capacity Development Mining Project (GENCAPD), which commenced in 1998 and concluded in 2004, contributed significantly to the implementation of several measures to address the negative impacts of gold mining on the environment. It was supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the major stakeholders involved were the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association, the Institutes of Applied Science and Technology, the Ministry of Health and the University of Guyana. One of the main focus areas of the project was the reduction of mercury releases into the environment. A number of studies were done in several mining districts to determine the level of mercury in the environment including in rivers, fishes, miners and residents. Capacity was built in the Agencies involved, in terms, of training and provision of equipment. Regulations, codes of practices and guidelines were developed to reduce mercury contamination from mining. Several public awareness activities were also undertaken, with the development of materials including a video. Workshops were also held in several mining areas. In addition, mercury retorts were made available to miners and a new programme was introduced at the University of Guyana which focused on the environmental issues relating to mining. This project was the largest implemented thus far in Guyana that resulted in measures being implemented to reduce mercury contamination through partnerships amongst the various stakeholders.

EPA GGMC Partnership

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has responsibility for the prevention of pollution in Guyana, while the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) has

responsibility for regulating the mining sector. These Agencies, over the years, have been collaborating in developing and implementing measures to reduce the impacts of mining on the environment. A Memorandum of Understanding also signed between the EPA and GGMC enhanced the efforts to address mercury contamination locally and these are usually done in partnership. Some of these initiatives include development of regulations, guidelines and code of practices; conducting of studies; developing public awareness materials; conducting workshops; etc.

Studies

Over the years a number of studies were done to determine the nature and extent of the mercury problem in Guyana. These studies were mainly joint initiatives supported by funding institutions such as CIDA and WWF-Guianas. Most of the relevant stakeholders were also involved in the studies including the EPA, GGMC, the Ministry of Health, the University of Guyana and the Institute of Applied Science and Technology. These studies included different monitoring programmes to study the level of mercury occurrence in some rivers and residents near gold mining activities in some communities. The information generated has contributed significantly to understanding the mercury problem in Guyana and has allowed for informed decision making and strategies to reduce mercury contamination.

GENCAPD 2 Phase II

Phase II of the GENCAPD project is presently being proposed to CIDA from the Government of Guyana (GoG). The goal of GENCAPD II is “*to promote gender sensitive private sector, economic, health and community development in Guyana.*” The anticipated timeframe is 3.5 years, starting September 2006. Phase II intends to sustain a focus on capacity building and support to the rural poor and the Amerindian population, which has the highest incidence of poverty. Phase II will contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable environmental management by focusing on the following activities –

- (i) **Development and expansion of small businesses, cottage industries and export opportunities.** Objective is to diversify and expand the hinterland economy – rearing and exporting tropical aquarium fish, pilot project cyanide old extraction plant, rehabilitation of mine sites for use as agriculture lands.

- (ii) **Protecting the environment.** Objective is to maintain a good quality of the waterways to support the Amerindian livelihoods. To achieve this, the importance and uses of settling and recycling ponds for tailings will be introduced to all mining districts not covered during Phase I.
- (iii) **Skills Training and Employment Programs** in the following areas will be provided - dry mining, tailings management, operation and monitoring of gold-cyanidation extraction plant, aquarium exotic fish harvesting and mine rehabilitation techniques.
- (iv) **Health and Sanitation.** Objective is to reduce the incidence of malaria, typhoid and Hg contamination via diets. To achieve this, training and awareness of better tailings management, improved sanitation facilities in mining camps and communities and alternative to indigenous carnivorous fish diets for pregnant and breast-feeding women will be introduced.

Additionally, ten (10) small projects focusing on poverty reduction, good governance, health and maternal and child care will be initiated and sustained by community members in the hinterland to promote community participation in the development process.

Capacity Building for the Management of Natural Resources and the Environment Project

This project, which is supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has a component that address environmental issues associated with mining. The key objective of this project is to implement an education campaign, which targets miners and community leaders and members. The objective of the campaign is to make these audiences aware of the purpose and requirements of the Mining (Amendment) Regulations 2005 which has outlined measures that must be implement by miners to reduce mercury release and contamination and the responsibilities of the miners and the GGMC. This project is being executed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by GGMC.

Other Initiatives

Currently, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) is working along with the EPA and other stakeholders to identify a viable project that will jointly be implemented to reduce mercury release and contamination. Generally, for any mercury reduction programme to be

successful in Guyana there is the need for partnerships between the relevant stakeholders. Guyana has achieved much over the years due to successful partnerships especially in the mining sector. However, there is still a far way to go to reduce mercury use and contamination of the environment.