

Community strategy concerning mercury

2005/2050(INI) - 24/06/2005

The Council recalled the conclusion that there is sufficient evidence of significant global adverse impacts to human health and/or the environment arising from the release of mercury to the environment and took note of the UNEP Governing Council Decision 22/4 (2003) and the UNEP Governing Council Decision 23/9 (2005) calling for the initiation of national, regional and global actions as soon as possible to protect human health and the environment through measures which will reduce or eliminate releases of mercury and its compounds to the environment.

It underlined the importance of reducing releases of mercury as well as the supply and demand for mercury in order to minimize mercury emissions in the environment and the exposure of humans to mercury, especially by methyl mercury in fish.

It welcomed the Commission's communication on a "Community Strategy concerning Mercury" and stressed the importance of the described integral approach as requested earlier by the Council, containing extended objectives for reducing mercury emissions and reducing the entry into circulation of mercury in society, as well as objectives for handling mercury surpluses, protection against mercury exposure and improving understanding of the mercury problem;

It also stressed the need for the EU to continue and intensify its international efforts to reduce mercury emissions and exposure on a global scale with a view to reaching a global phase-out of primary production, preventing surpluses re-entering the market, as well as phasing out its use and trade, taking into account the availability of alternatives;

It underlined, in this context, the importance of the proposal to phase out the export of mercury from the Community which should be further examined. It considered that the phasing out of the export of mercury from the Community as soon as possible, and by 2011 at the latest, while necessary, will not be sufficient to protect human health and the environment from the negative effects of the mercury released into the environment; and therefore an international commitment is needed in addition, with a view to agreeing on a legally-binding instrument.

It further underlined that for the further development and implementation of the strategy it will be essential:

- to pursue actions on a Community scale as well as on a global scale, taking into account the existing international legal framework as well as international trade rules, and the adoption of appropriate legal instruments,
- to address residual uses of mercury in the Community, for example in dental amalgam and vaccines,
- to develop viable techniques for a further reduction of mercury emissions from the combustion of fuels and to replace the use of mercury in gold mining,
- to address the safe storage or disposal of mercury from the chlor-alkali industry,
- to implement best available techniques inter alia in line with the IPPC Directive, for further reduction of mercury emissions from combustion processes,

- to share with actors inside and outside the Community the common vision of the strategy, its principles, goals and related objectives and to actively participate in its further development and to share the responsibility for its implementation, taking also voluntary initiatives from industry into account,
- to ensure transparency and openness that has characterised the process up until now,
- to recognise the importance of public awareness, communication and education for the further implementation of the strategy,
- to achieve ownership and long-term political commitment by all stakeholders for the goals and objectives of the strategy,
- to address priorities on mercury research and technology,
- to support countries with economies in transition and developing countries with a high dependency on solid fuels, like coal, in promoting the clean and efficient use of fuels.

It also acknowledges that there is an important role for Member States, industries and other relevant actors in the further development and implementation of the strategy.

It therefore invites the Commission to take action as soon as possible, and while supporting the reduction of supply, demand and emission on a global scale, to present appropriate proposals, in particular, on the following issues:

- the phasing out of the export of mercury from the Community and action to pursue the safe storage or disposal of mercury inter alia from the chlor-alkali industry to a timescale consistent with the intended phase out of mercury exports,
- marketing restrictions for consumer use and health care non-electrical or non-electronic measuring and control equipment containing mercury.