Community strategy concerning mercury

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Marios MATSAKIS (ALDE, CY) in response to the Commission communication on the Community strategy concerning mercury. MEPs welcomed the strategy paper and its aim of reducing and eventually phasing out emissions, supply and demand of mercury at European level. However, they underlined the need for this Community strategy to be followed by specific measures and legislative acts as soon as practicably possible. The Commission was asked to ensure that an EU mercury export ban is in place as soon as possible and at the latest by 2010, and that measures are put forward before the ban to track imports and exports of mercury within the Member States as well as to and from the EU.

The report also called on the Commission to come forward with proposals for legally binding measures to ensure that all mercury coming from the chlor-alkali industry is not put back into circulation and is safely stored, in secure sites. Furthermore, the use of mercury cell chlor-alkali plants should be phased out as soon as practicable, and in any case by 2010. MEPs also underlined the importance of applying the "polluter pays" principle, particularly as regards the storage of surplus mercury. They said that the industry sectors responsible for the production of mercury should contribute to the financing of safe storage.

The committee welcomed the Council's conclusion recognising the environmental and social problems arising from the closure of the long-established mercury mines in Almadén, Spain, as a consequence of the Community strategy concerning mercury. It recommended that adequate compensation measures be undertaken and duly funded by the Commission in order to allow the affected area to achieve viable economic and social alternatives. In view of the infrastructures and local manpower and technological expertise there, consideration should be given to the possibility of using Almadén for the safe storage of the existing metallicmercury stocks or metallicmercury sub-produced by industry all over Europe, but never its waste.

The report also pointed out that the main source of emissions of mercury was the burning of coal, and asked the Commission to introduce emission limit values. It also supported the Commission's proposal to ask the medical devices Expert Group to consider any potential hazard in the use of mercury in dental amalgam, and called for further measures, in the short term, to control mercury emissions from crematoria.

Other recommendations included: restricting the marketing and use of mercury in all measuring and control equipment for both consumer and professional uses; addressing the use of mercury in the manufacture of vaccines; conducting information campaigns to raise public awareness; financing communication with vulnerable population groups concerning the damaging impact of mercury; testing for methylmercury levels in fish, with a view to consumption recommendations being issued by the European Food Safety Authority; conducting an overall Health Impact Assessment to investigate the health costs from mercury contamination; and ensuring that funds are allocated for mercury research under the 7th RTD Framework Programme.