

Community strategy concerning mercury

2005/2050(INI) - 14/03/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Marios **MATSAKIS** (ALDE, CY) on mercury. It stated that mercury contamination is a widespread, persistent and diffuse problem, transported across international boundaries far from its sources, contaminating both the European and global food supplies. The Community Strategy on mercury proposed by the Commission is an important contribution to tackling this global threat, but further binding measures need to be taken at international and EU level in order to protect human health and the environment. Parliament also pointed out that 12 000 tonnes of mercury in the EU mercury-cell chlor-alkali industry - the biggest holding of mercury in the EU - is destined for decommissioning pursuant to PARCOM Decision 90/3. The EU needs to act urgently to phase out the exports of this surplus mercury in order to avoid environmental damage in third countries, in particular because EU mercury exports encourage the highly polluting use of mercury in gold mining.

Parliament underlined the importance of applying the polluter-pays principle, in particular as far as storage of surplus mercury is concerned. The industry sectors responsible for the production of mercury should contribute to the financing of the safe storage of surplus mercury

Parliament underlined the need for the Community Strategy to be followed by specific measures and legislative acts as soon as practicably possible. It asked the Commission to do the following;

- to propose an EU mercury export ban;
- to take action to implement PARCOM Decision 90/3 so as to phase out the use of mercury-cell chlor-alkali plants as soon as practicable, with the objective that they should be phased out completely by 2010;
- to propose before March 2008 measures to track imports and exports of mercury and its compounds within the Member States as well as to and from the Community, to be in place before the export ban;
- to consider an extension of the current prohibition on the export of mercury-containing soaps, provided for in Regulation 304/2003/EC to other mercury-containing products;
- to propose measures to ensure that all mercury coming from the chlor-alkali industry is not put back into circulation;
- to raise public awareness, by holding information campaigns, as regards the health risks, the risks of exposure, and the environmental problems that mercury can cause;
- to introduce under the IPPC Directive or in a separate legislative instrument, emission limit values for mercury from all relevant activities, and in particular from both large and small-scale coal combustion processes;
- to propose national mass emission limits as well as local air quality limits for mercury under relevant existing or separate legislative instruments;
- to control mercury emissions from crematoria, given that this is an increasing and worrisome source of emissions;

- to propose by the end of 2007 to restrict the use of mercury in dental amalgam and to investigate whether additional measures are needed to ensure that amalgam does not enter the waste stream ;
- to restrict the marketing and use of mercury in all measuring and control equipment for both consumer and professional uses (especially in households, healthcare facilities, schools and scientific and research institutions), but allowing for some exemptions only where adequate alternatives are not yet available;
- to address the use of mercury in the manufacture of vaccines, and to evaluate this with a view to achieving a restriction of such use and a total ban, when appropriate and safe alternatives exist, and to support research into viable options;
- to ensure that all remaining uses of mercury, not covered by the presented strategy, shall be subject to substitution by safe alternatives where feasible, under the proposed REACH Regulation;
- to assign priority to financing communication with vulnerable population groups concerning the damaging impact of mercury and to share good practices;
- to conduct an overall Health Impact Assessment to investigate the health costs from mercury contamination, including the reduced intellectual capacity of European children arising from mercury exposure;

Parliament 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 area affected by the closure of mercury mines to achieve viable economic and social alternatives.

Finally, Parliament called on the Commission to ensure restriction in the use of mercury in gold mining, by promoting at the same time non-mercury-using viable techniques, and furthermore to come forward with a proposal for a positive labelling scheme for gold that has been mined without the use of mercury, covering gold processed both inside and outside the EU.