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First concrete steps to make mercury history

The global fight against mercury, one of the most hazardous chemicals, reached an important milestone with the First Conference of the Parties (COP 1) of the Minamata Convention on Mercury from 24-29 September.

The EU has played an instrumental role in making this happen. Upon its initiative, the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#), was negotiated and concluded in 2013. On May 18 2017, the EU and seven of its Member States ratified the Convention and thereby brought the total number of ratifications over the legal threshold needed for entry into force (50 ratifications). Through the implementation of the Minamata Convention, EU standards will be applied, to a large degree, at a world-wide level.

Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, declared at the meeting's High Level Segment in Geneva: *"Global challenges call for global solutions. This Conference shows how multilateral environmental cooperation can be successful in achieving positive outcomes to tackle transboundary pollution issues. I am pleased that the achievement of a worldwide mercury-free society is an objective we can lean towards, thanks to the commitment of all."*

Among the successes of COP 1 is the adoption of guidance on controlling mercury emissions to air. This is a major step towards reducing pollution and exposure, which closely reflects advanced EU law. This guidance identifies the best available techniques (BAT) that Parties should use to reduce mercury emissions from industrial activities, including coal combustion, ferrous and non-ferrous metals and cement production sectors.

Additionally, all other technical documents have been agreed by the Parties, namely the forms to be used in the implementation of trade provisions and the guidance on the identification of stocks and large sources of mercury or mercury compounds. The participants also agreed on a robust reporting format that includes biennial reporting of key data on supply, trade and management of mercury waste alongside with full reporting every 4 years.

Background

The EU has one of the most ambitious policies for protection against mercury. However, as 40 to 80 % of mercury deposited in Europe comes from mercury emissions in other parts of the world, strong international action is needed to protect the health of our citizens.

Mercury is a chemical with neurotoxic effects, used in industrial processes and in a variety of products like batteries or thermometers. Mercury released to the environment enters the food chain where it accumulates mainly in fish. Exposure to high levels of mercury can cause harm to the brain, lungs, kidneys and immune system. Over the past twenty years the EU has developed a comprehensive body of legislation covering all aspects of the mercury lifecycle, from primary mining to waste disposal, including measures on trade, products containing mercury and mercury pollution.

For More Information

<http://cop1.mercuryconvention.org/>

[Questions and Answers on EU Mercury Policy and the Minamata Convention](#)

[Minamata Convention text and the status of ratifications](#)

[EU Mercury Policy](#)