

MEPs back mercury pollution curbs, in line with UN Minamata convention

New legislation restricting the use of mercury, a persistent pollutant that has adverse effects on the environment and human health, was adopted by Parliament on Tuesday. The bill, already informally agreed with the Council of Ministers, aims to close the gap between existing EU legislation and the United Nations Minamata Convention against mercury pollution.

“Mercury is acutely toxic and is one of the ten most damaging naturally occurring substances on this planet. Foetuses, newborns and children are the most vulnerable group, since in the growth phase the brain and the nervous system react very sensitively to mercury”, said lead MEP Stefan Eck (GUE/NGL, DE). “Although I hoped for a more ambitious text, we can at least expect a reduction in the use of mercury after the adoption of the report”, he added.

The legislation will replace the 2008 mercury export ban regulation, while incorporating its provisions. It also restricts mercury imports, bans its use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining, and phases out its use in manufacturing processes.

Dental amalgam

The legislation also aims to phase out the use of mercury in dental amalgam by 2030, and limits the maximum permitted period for temporary storage of waste mercury to five years, with a possible extension of three years.

The European Commission will have to produce an inventory of contaminated sites within three years, based on the data provided by member states.

The text agreed with Council of ministers was approved with 663 votes to 8 and 28 abstentions.

Note to editors

The United Nations' Minamata Convention on mercury was agreed in 2013 with a view to protecting human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury. Although mercury use has declined significantly in recent decades, mercury released into the air, water and land remains a serious threat to human health and the environment. Once emitted into the

air or water, mercury can travel over long distances, which makes it a global problem.

Procedure: ordinary legislative procedure, first reading agreement

Further information

[Steps of the procedure](#)

[Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#)

[Stefan Eck \(GUE/NGL, DE\)](#)

[EP research: Mercury: aligning the EU legislation with Minamata](#)

[Minamata convention on mercury](#)

[Adopted text \(2016/0023\(COD\)\) will soon be available here \(14.03.2017\)](#)

[Video recording of debate \(click on 13.03.2017\)](#)

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Contacts

Baptiste CHATAIN

Press Officer

 (+32) 2 28 40992 (BXL)

 (+33) 3 881 74151 (STR)

 (+32) 498 98 13 37

 [@EP_Environment](#)

 baptiste.chatain@europarl.europa.eu
