

THE MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

The Minamata Convention on Mercury is an international environmental agreement that aims to protect human health and the environment from human-caused emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

The Minamata Convention is not yet in force. It will come into force 90 days after its 50th ratification. The current ratification status of the Convention can be viewed at mercuryconvention.org.

WHAT IS MERCURY AND WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

Mercury is a metal that is a liquid at room temperature and evaporates easily. The chemical symbol for mercury is Hg.

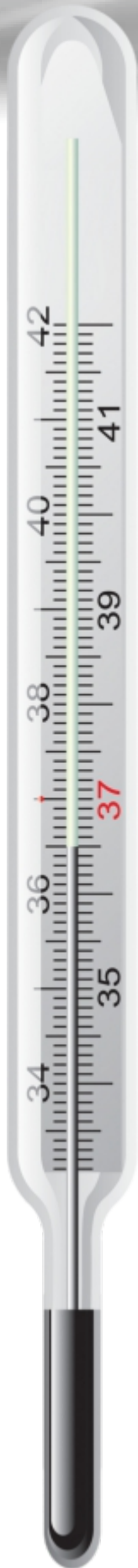
Once mercury and mercury compounds enter the environment, they don't easily degrade or break down. Instead, they remain in soil, air and water for many years. Mercury and its compounds can be transported long distances from their points of origin, and they accumulate in living organisms, with concentrations becoming higher and higher as mercury moves up through the food chain.



Mercury (chemical symbol: Hg) is also referred to as quicksilver



Mercury can accumulate in the aquatic food chain, making fish unsafe to eat



The World Health Organization considers mercury to be among the top ten chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern. Mercury causes a variety of adverse effects on human health. The major one is damage to neurological systems. Mercury may also have toxic effects on the digestive and immune systems, and can affect memory, vision, muscle strength and coordination, and fertility.

Mercury can permanently damage the developing brain and nervous system. Because of this, and because mercury can be transferred from mothers to fetuses in the womb during pregnancy, babies, small children, and pregnant women are considered to be the populations most at risk of harm from exposure to mercury.

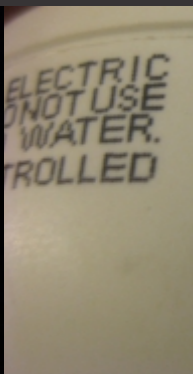
WHAT IS MERCURY USED FOR?

The main anthropogenic source of mercury emissions worldwide is its use in artisanal and small scale gold mining (ASGM). ASGM is a major contributor to the economies of Guyana and Suriname. Small scale mining also takes place, to a much smaller extent, in Belize and Haiti. The use of mercury to purify gold poses risk to human health and the environment both in the remote areas where gold is mined and in town and cities where gold is refined. The monitoring and regulating of mercury use in ASGM is a major challenge in countries where this practice is widespread. Both Guyana and Suriname have

been taking steps to control and reduce the use of mercury in gold mining.

Mercury and mercury compounds are also used in a wide array of everyday products, including batteries, switches, thermometers, fluorescent lamps, skin-lightening creams, and dental amalgam used for filling teeth. When these products are disposed in dumps and landfills, the mercury contained in them can contaminate air, soil and water. Mercury is also emitted and released to the environment from oil and gas refineries, cement plants, and other industrial facilities.

Uses of Mercury





WHAT WILL THE MINAMATA CONVENTION DO ABOUT MERCURY?

The Minamata Convention sets out several measures that Parties are expected to take to reduce harmful emissions and releases of mercury. These include measures to:

- Control the supply and trade of mercury;
- Control the manufacture, import and export of mercury-added products, including phase-out of some products by the year 2020;
- Control manufacturing processes in which mercury or mercury compounds are used;
- Control the use of mercury and mercury compounds in ASGM;
- Control emissions and releases of mercury from industrial facilities;
- Ensure environmentally sound interim storage of mercury;
- Ensure environmentally sound disposal of wastes consisting of, containing, or contaminated with mercury or mercury compounds; and
- Educate, protect, treat and care for populations at risk of, or affected by, mercury exposure.

WHAT CAN CARICOM COUNTRIES DO ABOUT MERCURY?

A key first step for CARICOM countries would be to carry out national mercury inventories and assessments to determine how much, and how, mercury (including as mercury compounds and in mercury-added products) is being imported, used, stored, exported, emitted, released, and disposed of in each country. Once this information has been gathered and evaluated, countries will be able to develop and implement national plans to reduce or eliminate production, use, trade, emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.



**FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR ACTION ON
MERCURY IN CARICOM COUNTRIES IS AVAILABLE FROM**

The Interim Secretariat of the Minimata Convention on Mercury
mercuryconvention.org

**The Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and
Technology Transfer for the Caribbean Region**
bcr-caribbean.blogspot.com

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research
mercury.unitar.org

The Global Environment Facility
www.thegef.org/gef/reducing_mercury

The International POPs Elimination Network
www.ipen.org

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