

Highlights of the Consultative Forum on the Management of Mercury

(October 2009, Sulo Hotel, Philippines)




BACKGROUND

- The forum formed part of the Philippine government's preparation for the UNEP Ad-Hoc Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) Meeting held last October 2009 in Thailand. The task of the OEWG is to initiate preliminary discussions on establishing global controls on mercury.
- The aim of the forum was to gather information and share experiences of relevant stakeholders on the issue of mercury and wastes contaminated with mercury and to initiate discussion on the need for terminal storage facility of mercury and mercury-contaminated wastes in the Philippines



ATTENDANCE

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- Attended by representatives from:
- EMB-CO, EMB-NCR, EMB-IVA, EMB-V, EMB-IX, EMB-X, EMB-XI
 - PELMATP-DOE, OSHC-DOLE, BOI-DTI, DepEd, NCDPC-DOH, ITDI-DOST
 - Ban Toxics, Ecowaste Coalition, Healthcare Without Harm
 - Philippine Children's Medical Center, Philippine Heart Center, San Lazaro Hospital
 - CDC, PCAPI-NCR, PCAPI-VII, PDA, OHNAP
 - Dolomatrix Phils., Inc.,

HIGHLIGHTS

- What concrete steps should be taken to address problem of mercury waste? Is it an amendment of some law/policy? Is there a need for a total ban on mercury?
 - There is a need to check whether alternatives are feasible, before we can talk about a mercury ban.
 - Although there are already alternatives available, there are also limitations to certain products.
 - Taking into consideration the mining industry, being one of the biggest users of mercury in the Philippines, there are alternatives to mercury but some might not be good either, like the process that uses cyanide. Other countries may have safer technologies but these are also expensive.




- The dental industry are no longer using mercury amalgam fillings, since composites were developed. They now use an amount of mercury and silver, already pre-measured and encapsulated so there's no excess mercury that will need to be disposed.
- Dental schools still use mercury in teaching.
- Even if city dentists don't use mercury anymore, there is still a problem with dentists who are not within a fixed hospital system, and instead have their own small neighborhood clinics. The same goes with rural health units, provincial practitioners, medical missions, etc. Since they are not in a strictly structured hospital system, they dispose of their mercury wastes in whatever way they see it fit.
- What about crematoriums? If the deceased have mercury fillings, wouldn't that be released upon cremation?
- EMB-DENR has encountered difficulties in enforcing their mandate on small dental clinics.



- Is there a need to register each mercury user that generates mercury waste? Then, every household has to register since they use fluorescent bulbs, thermometers, etc. That would be ideal but there are not enough people to implement it.
- We can't have a regulation where we have to monitor 90 million people. It would be impractical.
- There is already a EMB-DENR initiative on performing a mercury inventory. Let's identify which industries still use it then maybe consider modifying the CCO.





Will we be required to present a unified statement or plan of action regarding mercury and mercury storage during the OEWG Meeting?

- They should just be knowledgeable on the inventory and on the initiatives.
- We do have something to share to the international congregation because we participate in a number of UNEP-DTIE projects:
 - A mercury inventory, which is a quick-start program funded by UNEP
 - A project on mercury waste and mercury-containing waste, with small-scale funding also by UNEP
- It shouldn't be EMB-DENR, the enforcers, who will regulate a storage facility