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Report on activities under the UNEP mercury programme

Report on activities carried out under the partnership programme

1. The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in its decision 24/3 IV on chemicals management, established an ad hoc open-ended working group of Governments, regional economic integration organizations and stakeholder representatives to review and assess options for enhanced voluntary measures and new or existing international legal instruments for addressing the global challenges presented by mercury.

2. By paragraphs 26 and 27 of the same decision the Governing Council also urged Governments and other stakeholders to continue and enhance their support for the UNEP mercury programme partnerships.

3. Document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.2/9 provides a report on progress in strengthening the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership, particularly as the strengthening of the Partnership relates to discussions on options for addressing the global challenges presented by mercury.

4. The present document summarizes specific partnership area activities for the information of the Open-ended Working Group.

I. Status of partnership area business plans

5. As noted in document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.2/9, UNEP, as requested by the Governing Council in decision 24/3 IV, has developed in consultation with Governments and other stakeholders an overarching framework for the mercury partnership programme. The framework includes business plans, partnership goals and operational guidelines. The business plans called for in the overarching framework have been drafted for the following partnership areas:

(a) Artisanal and small-scale gold mining;

(b) Mercury cell chlor-alkali production;

(c) Mercury air transport and fate research;

* UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.2/1.

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(d) Mercury-containing products;

(e) Mercury releases from coal combustion;

(f) Mercury waste management.

6. The business plans, outlining partnership area activities, are posted on the website of the Chemicals Branch of the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics at http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/partnerships/new_partnership.htm.

7. In addition, UNEP consulted with stakeholders during the first meeting of the Open-ended Working Group and the stakeholders attending the meeting of partners and other stakeholders that took place in Geneva from 1 to 3 April 2008. Taking those consultations into account UNEP prepared draft business plans for the non-ferrous metals mining and mercury supply and storage partnership areas. These draft business plans are also posted on the website noted above. At this stage, however, no lead has been identified for these areas and the plans should be considered as initial drafts. Further information on expanding the partnerships (in particular with respect to vinyl chloride monomer production and cement production) is included in document UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.2/9.

II. Highlights of partnership area activities

8. Participants may wish to consult the partnership area business plans cited above for a full listing of current partnership work.

A. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining

9. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is acting as lead in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining partnership area. The objective of this partnership area is the continued reduction and elimination of mercury uses and releases in artisanal and small-scale gold mining. The partnership area has set a target of a 50 per cent reduction in mercury demand in artisanal and small-scale gold mining by the year 2017.

10. Key activities in this area include:

(a) A UNEP “country strategic plan” project in South-East Asia (focused on Cambodia and the Philippines) funded by the Quick Start Programme under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). Additional projects are planned in South America and Africa;

(b) Construction of installations to capture mercury vapour released during gold processing in the Amazon region and global dissemination of information on the technology being used (technology developed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Argonne National Laboratory and manufactured locally);

(c) Partner efforts to implement a West Africa regional mercury reduction project, including current work in Senegal to reduce mercury exposures and health impacts.

B. Mercury cell chlor-alkali production

11. The United States of America is acting as lead in this partnership area. The objective of this partnership area is to minimize significantly and, where feasible, eliminate global mercury releases to air, water and land that may occur from chlor-alkali production facilities.

12. Key activities in this area include:

(a) The World Chlorine Council annual reporting to UNEP on mercury emissions and consumption in the chlor-alkali industry. The data provided is estimated to cover about 85 per cent of the world chlorine production capacity based on companies using mercury and is available on the UNEP mercury programme website;

(b) Russian chlor-alkali project to minimize mercury emissions and use, to ensure environmentally-safe management of mercury-containing waste and to provide opportunities for ultimate conversion to non-mercury technologies.

C. Mercury air transport and fate research

13. Italy is acting as lead in this partnership area. The objective is to increase global understanding of international mercury emissions sources, fate and transport by accelerating the development of sound scientific information to address uncertainties and data gaps in global mercury cycling and its patterns

(e.g., air concentrations and deposition rates, source-receptor relationships, hemispheric and global air transport and transformation and emission sources), by enhancing information sharing among scientists and between them and policymakers and by providing technical assistance and training, where possible, to support the development of critical information.

14. Key activities in this area include:

(a) Development of a fate and transport partnership report that describes the state of the science on global emissions, air monitoring, and air modeling, provides an overview of mercury in atmospheric processes on hemispheric and global scales and identifies research needs;

(b) Field-testing of the toolkit for the identification and quantification of mercury releases in the Asian region, through funding from the UNEP Mercury Trust Fund.

D. Mercury-containing products

15. The United States of America is acting as lead in this partnership area. The partnership area objective is to phase out and eventually eliminate mercury in products and to eliminate releases during manufacturing and other industrial processes via environmentally sound production, transportation, storage, and disposal processes. Numerical targets have been set for 2017 for various product categories (including batteries, lamps, dental amalgam, measuring and control devices, electrical and electronic devices and others such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and traditional and ritual uses).

16. Key activities in this area include:

(a) Health-care projects aimed at reducing the use of mercury-containing measuring and control devices, including projects in Argentina, Chile, China, Costa Rica and Mexico;

(b) Work by the Secretariat of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal to build capacity and promote best management practices for addressing mercury waste collected from health care products and in other sectors addressing mercury in products;

(c) “Mercury in products” awareness-raising workshops in Latin America and Asia in 2006 and 2007;

(d) Mercury inventory and risk management planning activities sponsored by the United States of America and implemented through the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and South Africa.

E. Mercury releases from coal combustion

17. The International Energy Agency (IEA) Clean Coal Centre is acting as lead in this partnership area. The objective of this partnership area is the continued minimization and elimination of mercury releases from coal combustion where possible. While at this stage no numerical targets can be established for this partnership area, this may be revisited upon finalization of the UNEP report on atmospheric emissions, which will feature information on trends. This report should enable the partnership to make a more advanced assessment of a baseline scenario and project a goal for 2015.

18. Key activities in this area include:

(a) Development of guidance materials to promote reductions of mercury emissions from coal combustion;

(b) Publication of the IEA Clean Coal Centre document, “Economics of Mercury Control”;

(c) Publication of the European Cement Association worldwide data compilation on the status of mercury emissions from cement kilns;

(d) Joint work by the Russian Federation and the United States of America to develop low-cost technology for improved air pollution control at power plants in the Russian Federation.

F. Mercury waste management

19. The Government of Japan is acting as lead in this partnership area, which was initiated in early 2008. The objective of the partnership area is to minimize and, where feasible, eliminate unintentional mercury releases to air, water, and land from waste containing mercury and mercury compounds by following a life cycle management approach.

20. Activities are currently being considered. The key initial activity will be to foster cooperation on initiatives related to the finalization of the draft Basel Convention Technical Guidelines on Environmentally Sound Management of Mercury Waste.

G. Non-ferrous metals mining

21. No lead has been identified for this partnership area. A lead is necessary for coordinated activity to be actively pursued in this area.

22. The draft business plan prepared by UNEP in collaboration with key stakeholders is posted on the website of the Chemicals Branch of the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics at http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/partnerships/new_partnership.htm.

23. No activity has been initiated in this area.

H. Mercury supply and storage

24. No lead has been identified for this area. A lead is necessary for coordinated activity to be actively pursued in this area.

25. The draft business plan prepared by UNEP in collaboration with key stakeholders is posted on the website of the Chemicals Branch of the UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics at http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/partnerships/new_partnership.htm.

26. Key initial activities in this area include:

(a) Primary mercury mining project in Kyrgyzstan sponsored by Switzerland and the United States of America;

(b) Mercury storage projects being initiated in Asia and South America.