



EU RULES ON MERCURY IN ACTION

Hg Reducing use and emissions of mercury

EU policies targeting highly toxic mercury pollution have led to a dramatic drop in EU emissions and a reduction of mercury exposure and use in products and industrial processes. Highlights:

- the use of Best Available Techniques is reducing emissions of mercury to the environment;
- large industrial uses of mercury have been prohibited;
- mercury products have been either prohibited or regulated to reduce mercury use and exposure.

The European Union is on track to becoming mercury-free thanks to its long-standing policy to cut pollution from this indestructible and highly toxic substance.

Exposure to small quantities of mercury can cause serious health problems affecting the nervous, cardiovascular, immune and reproductive systems. This can also harm a child's brain development, both before and after birth. While mercury pollution is largely airborne, vast amounts end up in seas and oceans. Most people are therefore exposed to mercury mainly through their diet, in particular by consuming contaminated seafood.

The EU requires the use of best available techniques to reduce emissions from all relevant industrial activities, especially coal combustion, waste incineration, cement production and the manufacture and smelting of metals. Mercury emissions to the air dropped by around 73% between 1990 and 2014 and to water by 71% between 2007 and 2014.

In addition, the EU banned mercury-containing batteries, thermometers, barometers and blood pressure monitors. Mercury is also no longer allowed in most switches and relays found in electronic equipment. Energy-efficient lamps using mercury technology are only permitted on the market with a reduced mercury content.

From July 2018, the biggest remaining application for mercury in the EU, dental amalgam, will be prohibited from use on vulnerable patients. Dental clinics have to install high-performance filters, which will significantly reduce mercury releases to water. Further actions are envisaged to reduce and ultimately end the use of dental amalgam.

However, EU action alone is not sufficient and global mercury pollution has to be cut to further protect EU citizens from contamination. Up to 80% of the mercury deposited in the EU is from non-EU countries.

The EU has been at the forefront of mobilising the international community to reduce mercury pollution. This included prohibiting mining and export of mercury from the EU to discourage its use in artisanal and small scale gold mining that affects the lives of some 15 million people in developing countries, including up to 4.5 million children and women.

These efforts resulted in the 2013 Minamata Convention on Mercury, a legally binding international agreement aimed at tackling mercury pollution, which makes many EU rules global.



CHEMICALS



AIR
QUALITY

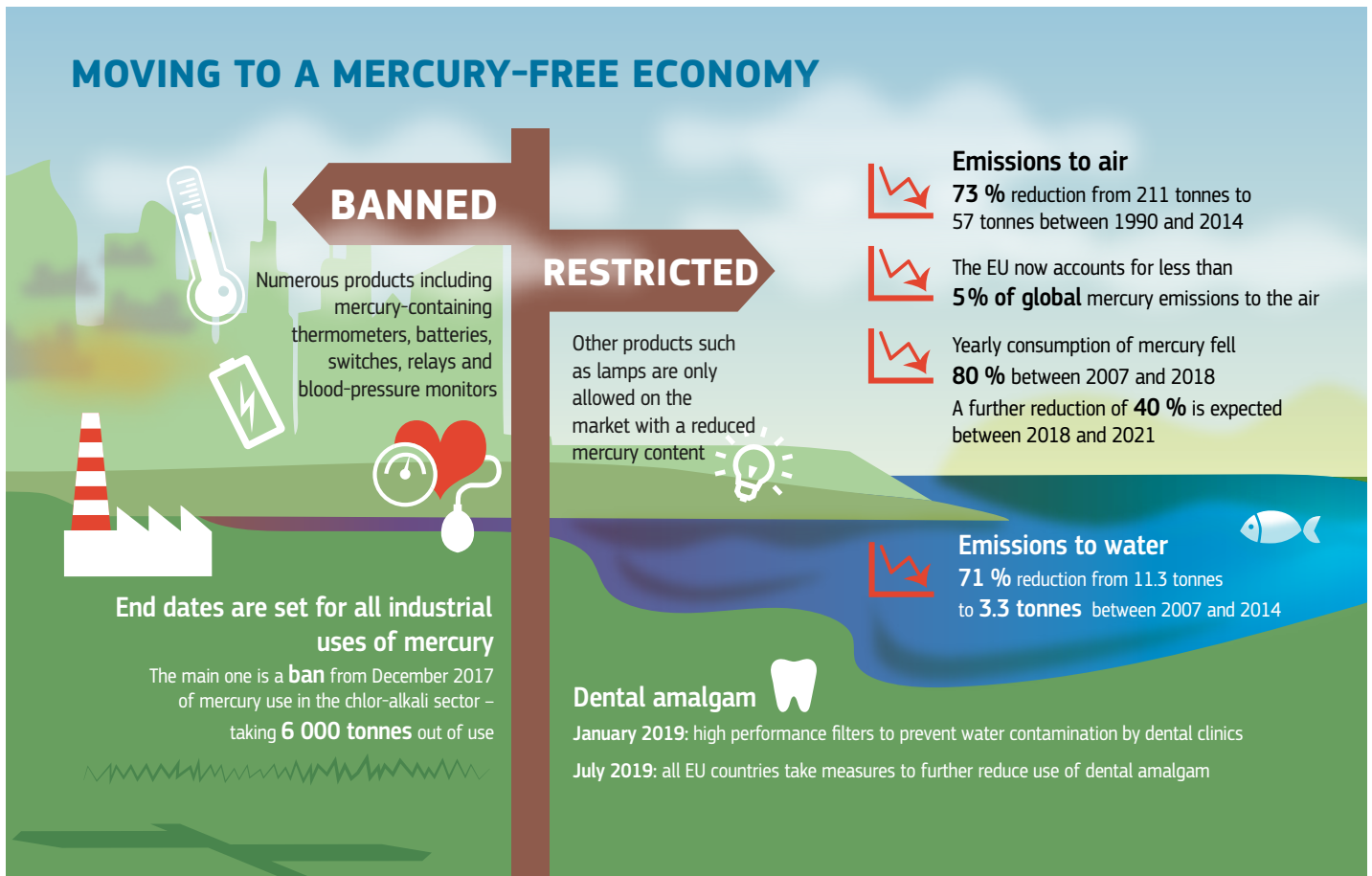


WATER
QUALITY



Mercury policy – main improvements:

- EU mercury consumption is dramatically falling as uses in products and industry are being prohibited;
- the continuous fall in EU mercury emissions to air and water contributes to limiting the build-up of mercury in the food chain;
- innovative mercury-free products and manufacturing processes create new business opportunities worldwide.



More information

EU Mercury policy

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/mercury/index_en.htm

Minamata Convention on Mercury

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/mercury/ratification_en.htm

Industrial Emissions Directive

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/industry/stationary/ied/legislation.htm>

Best Available Techniques

Chlor-alkali industry: <http://europa.eu/!Fb37KH>

Iron & steel: <http://europa.eu/!YF86rH>

Non-ferrous metals: <http://europa.eu/!MH93nv>

Cement, lime and magnesium-oxide: <http://europa.eu/!GQ34tM>

Large Combustion Plants: <http://europa.eu/!bt47JV>

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Print	ISBN 978-92-79-80294-2	doi:10.2779/190420	KH-04-18-213-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-79-80293-5	doi:10.2779/791147	KH-04-18-213-EN-N