



Primera Conferencia Latinoamericana sobre la Eliminación del Mercurio en el Cuidado de la Salud

Buenos Aires Declaration

First Latin American Conference on the Elimination of Mercury in Health Care
3-4 August 2006, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Whereas

The Hippocratic Oath, “First Do No Harm,” is more relevant today than ever. For while scientific progress allows us to treat illnesses with efficiency, it also engenders a paradox; the health care sector emits a diversity of harmful pollutants. One of these is mercury, which is broadly used in medical products and devices.

The United Nations Environment Programme’s Global Mercury Assessment demonstrated that sufficient scientific evidence exists regarding the adverse global effects of mercury and its compounds. Measures are needed to reduce and ultimately eliminate mercury’s risks to human health and the environment.

Latin American health care institutions, as centers of prevention and care for patients, workers, the community and the environment, should end their contribution to mercury pollution and work toward the progressive elimination of mercury containing devices, replacing them with accessible, accurate and available alternatives.

The health care sector in the region should also play a central leadership role on this issue, raising awareness in the broader community on the risks and impacts of mercury, along with safer alternatives that can ultimately completely replace it.

Considering that:

The World Health Organization has issued a policy that promotes the elimination of mercury in the health care sector.

There are examples around the world where countries and individual institutions have taken measures to eliminate mercury in health care. Among them are:

- * The Philippines, India, Brazil, Cuba, Uruguay and Argentina, where a diversity of health care establishments have already taken a series of steps to eliminate mercury.
- * Sweden, which has eliminated the sale of mercury containing products—thermometers, electrical devices, syphygmomonometers, thermostats and other equipment--along with the use of dental amalgam.

- * The European Parliament, which is debating legislation to prohibit the use and export of mercury containing devices.
- * The United States, where the health care sector has transformed itself, adopting mercury-free alternatives, and where various states have banned mercury thermometers and sphygmomanometers.

Numerous professional associations are adopting resolutions calling for the reduction and elimination of mercury containing medical devices.

The mercury problem is not only generated by health care. Rather mercury pollution also comes from mining, chlor-alkali plants, coal-fired power plants and florescent bulb production, among others. Mercury and mercury containing products flow throughout the global economy.

The environment does not recognize borders; mercury pollution from any one country contributes to the load in the global ecosystem that is affecting our natural resources and the health of the peoples of the world.

Organic mercury is persistent in nature.

We, the participants in the First Latin American Conference on the Elimination of Mercury in the Health Care Sector, agree to

Push for the planned and progressive replacement of mercury containing instruments and devices used by the health care sector. We will also advocate for appropriate regulation, legislation and enforcement at the national and local levels.

Raise awareness by providing information, education and training for decision makers, health care workers, and the community, focusing on the impacts of mercury and the need to replace it.

Promote the incorporation of this issue into the curricula used by educational institutions at all levels.

Research mercury use in our health care institutions and sign a pledge for progressive mercury elimination and its replacement with safer alternatives.

Promote the creation of infrastructure to adequately manage and dispose of mercury waste.

Push for Extended Producer Responsibility for mercury-based medical devices.

Work with industries that produce economically viable mercury-free alternatives.

Change purchasing patterns in health care institutions, by phasing-in mercury-free medical devices.

Certify those institutions that go mercury-free.

At a global level, support the efforts of the European Union to ban the export and import of products that contain mercury. Promote the transfer of mercury-free technology. Advocate for a legally binding international instrument, or the inclusion of organic mercury in the Stockholm Convention, so as to substantially reduce the global mercury supply and demand.