

Phasing Out Mercury-added Products: SKIN LIGHTENING PRODUCTS AND OTHER COSMETICS



Join the Global Effort to Reduce Mercury in Consumer Products

Understanding the Issue

Mercury is a common ingredient used in skin lightening or anti-aging soaps and creams because mercury salts inhibit the formation of melanin, the pigment that gives human skin, hair, and eyes their color. Mercury is also added to some cosmetics for its properties as a preservative, preventing the growth of bacteria and fungi. A wide range of mercury levels are found in these products and often the amount of mercury in them is not disclosed to the consumer.

Risks to Human Health and the Environment

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the main health risk is kidney damage, but the use of these products can also result in allergic reactions, skin irritation, or neurotoxicity.

In addition to human health, the environment is also at risk. Mercury in these products is eventually released into wastewater where it enters the environment and, under certain conditions, can be absorbed into the food web, contaminating the food we eat.

Why Should Your Country Participate?

- Build capacity in your country to comply with Article 4 of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which prohibits the manufacture, import, or export of specific mercury-added products after 2020.
- Include your country-specific data in a global database on mercury content of cosmetics. By participating in this effort, your country's data will help toward developing feasible solutions to this issue.
- Position your country for Next Steps in the global effort to reduce exposure to mercury (see back page).

Who Should Be Concerned?

- Ministries where there are vulnerable populations.
- Industry professionals that manufacture, distribute, and sell these products.
- General public and consumers of these products.

Quick Notes

- **Minamata Convention requirements:** Ban on manufacture and trade of skin lightening creams with mercury > 1 ppm, after 2020
- **Some countries with potential concern:** Developing countries in the tropics
- **Some countries making progress in mercury-free solutions:** EU countries and the USA
- **Collaborative project:** In collaboration with the Zero Mercury Working Group, Biodiversity Research Institute is testing samples of skincare products and cosmetics for mercury content, most of which do not include mercury in their ingredient labels.

Learn How You Can Participate

Details about how you can participate are on the reverse side of this flyer.



2) What Does BRI Do?

We analyze products for mercury content (our goal is to provide customs agents with the means to efficiently screen imported products for the presence of mercury.)



Cosmetics sampling helps meet the objectives of **Article 4** of the Minamata Convention.



3) What Do You Receive?

Country-specific mercury data on products that may affect your health.

1) What Do You Provide to Us?

Cosmetic and skin-care products that may contain mercury.



Sampling Process: Skincare Products and Cosmetics



Next Steps: Become a Partner in Global Mercury Monitoring

Assessing the hazards in consumer products is vital in order to protect the health of local communities. Although some countries require clear and accurate ingredient labeling for these products, other countries may omit the list of ingredients or, if a list is included, the list may be misleading.

If you are interested in joining the international effort to test cosmetic products for mercury contamination, please consider the following steps:

1. Contact **Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)**. We will provide guidance and protocols on all aspects of the process.
2. Develop partnerships among and within your country's Ministries and local nongovernmental organizations.
3. Determine your goals and objectives, which BRI can then help to connect with the Minamata Convention.
4. Identify funding sources to cover expenses (e.g., purchasing products to submit for testing, shipping, lab analysis).
5. Identify markets most likely to sell contaminated creams/products.
6. Ship samples to BRI.
7. BRI will analyze samples, and interpret the results of chemical analyses.
8. Submit report to country Ministry.

To join this effort, please contact:

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Alternative to Mercury-added Products

UN Environment is developing a list of manufacturers of mercury-free products on a worldwide basis. This publication, planned for distribution in 2019, highlights manufacturers of mercury-free skin lightening products (soaps and creams). For more information, visit: www.unep.org



BRI Science Communications



BRI's publications help advance environmental awareness and inform decision makers about the research we conduct. For example:

Phasing Out/Phasing Down Mercury-added Products highlights products outlined in the Minamata Convention. 2018



Available online: www.briloon.org/hgpubs

Additional Resources



Zero Mercury Working Group
www.zeromercury.org



United Nations Environment
www.unep.org



Basel Convention Regional Centres
www.basel.int

Related Web Links

Minamata Convention on Mercury:
www.mercuryconvention.org

United Nations Development Programme:
www.undp.org

United Nations Environment:
www.unep.org/chemicalsandwaste

United Nations Industrial Development Organization: www.unido.org

World Health Organization: www.who.int



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