

## EU VOTES ON MERCURY AND CADMIUM BAN IN CERTAIN TYPES OF BATTERIES

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, the European Parliament Environment Committee voted on the ban of mercury in button cell batteries by 2014 and cadmium accumulators for cordless power tools by 2015. It is proposed that the changes will be implemented by a revision of the European Batteries Directive 2006/66/EC<sup>1</sup>. This decision was received favourably by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) as banning mercury in button cell batteries marks an important step towards the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The Minamata Convention, named after a Japanese city where mercury pollution has caused serious health damage in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, is an international effort to address the health and environmental effects of mercury. After four years of negotiation, in January this year, over 140 UN member states have agreed to the provisions of this treaty, in an attempt to control and reduce not only mercury products, but also mercury-emitting or releasing processes and industries.

Under the treaty, the production, export and import of a range of mercury containing products, such as batteries, switches, certain types of compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), will be banned by the year 2020. The treaty is expected to come into force in three to five years' time and already shows some effect not only in the European Union.<sup>2</sup>

The currently allowed use of mercury and cadmium in certain types of batteries and accumulators is based on exemptions in the Directive 2006/66/EC. Currently button cell batteries may contain up to 2% mercury by weight according to the Directive's Article 4, Paragraph 2., and the use of cadmium is unlimited in certain portable batteries and accumulators according to the Directive's Article 4, Paragraph 3. The European Parliament Environment Committee's vote to eliminate mercury in button cell batteries and cadmium accumulators was based on the findings of two studies<sup>3</sup> funded by the European Commission, which showed significant environmental and economic arguments in favor of the ban and identified a series of commercially available, appropriate mercury substitutes that are already being used on the EU market. There is currently no information on designated substance limits for the two heavy metals available which would give an indication what a ban would actually mean from a technical perspective.



<sup>1</sup> [Directive 2006/66/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 September 2006](#)

<sup>2</sup> [SafeGuards 043/13](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Environment NGOs call for a ban on Cadmium in batteries for cordless power tools \(CPTs\) and on Mercury in button cells batteries](#)

The three-year deadline for the withdrawal of obsolete, non-compliant batteries is not in consensus with the view of the EEB and the ZMWG who were in favor of a one-year period. This would have ensured that such non-compliant batteries would be off the market sooner. Negotiations will now take place between the Council and the Parliament to ensure that a final agreement on the subject of phasing out mercury from batteries by 2014 and cadmium by 2015 is reached, with minimum delay to the removal of non-compliant supplies.

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