

MERCURY POLICY PROJECT

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January 19, 2001

J.S.Gansler

The Under Secretary of Defense

3010 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301-3010

Dear Mr. Gansler:

We, the undersigned individuals and groups, are writing to strongly urge the Department of Defense (DoD) to allow commercial quantities of mercury, including the 260,000 pounds of mercury from the closed HoltraChem plant in Maine, to be stored at the DoD's National Defense Stockpile. Allowing additional quantities of mercury from facilities like HoltraChem to be sold and haphazardly released--rather than stockpiled for retirement--presents an imminent danger that DoD has a moral obligation and is empowered under current Federal law to prevent.

As you indicated in a recent letter to Maine Governor Angus King, current Federal statute, U.S.C. 2692, permits the DoD to store toxic or hazardous material not owned by DoD when essential to protect the public from imminent danger. At this time, there is more than sufficient evidence that clearly demonstrates the dangers of mercury sales and subsequent releases on human populations. This includes the release of the December 1997 *Mercury Study Report to Congress* and the congressionally-mandated July 2000 report by the National Research Council, entitled "*Toxicological Effects of Methylmercury*," which states:

"Hg is pervasive and persistent in the environment. Its use in products and emission from industrial processes and combustion have resulted in global circulation and atmospheric deposition. There have been well-documented instances of population poisonings, highly exposed occupational groups, and worldwide chronic low-level environmental exposures. The bioaccumulation of MeHg can lead to high concentrations in many species of fish and result in unacceptable levels of exposure and risk to highly exposed or susceptible subpopulations...The committee estimates that over 60,000 children are born each year at risk for adverse neurodevelopmental effects due to in utero exposure to MeHg."

As awareness of the dangers of mercury grow, a number of actions are begin taken across the United States (US) to stop mercury sales, uses and releases. Many US cities, states and hospitals, including Boston, San Francisco, and New Hampshire, are phasing out

mercury thermometers as a first step towards eliminating the possibility of mercury leaking into the environment. In the northeastern US, state and Federal environmental officials have attempted to negotiate the purchase of the HoltraChem mercury-- provided that DoD allows its storage at the National Defense Stockpile. In addition to adopting a resolution in September in support of stockpiling large quantities of mercury, the New England governors had earlier written a letter to President Clinton in support of developing "...strategies for the interim storage of mercury until more permanent long term options can be implemented."

Over the past five to ten years, mercury use in developed countries has declined dramatically. In developing countries, however, mercury is still used widely in the manufacture of consumer products, like thermometers, as well as in chlorine production where regulations are often lax or nonexistent. So, even as we phase out this extremely persistent toxic metal from our products and lives in the United States, we shamelessly export it to industrializing countries knowing full well the magnitude of dangers to human lives and environment can cause in these countries and in the US when the mercury comes back in products or rains down upon us from the global pool.

Therefore, recovered mercury should be considered a liability and set aside as a dangerous waste--and not masked as a commodity and sold to unsuspecting third world countries like India. Clearly, DoD can and should fulfill its statutory mandate by recognizing the dangers presented both in the US and abroad by the sale of commercial quantities of mercury, like the HoltraChem mercury, to third world countries. Instead, commercial quantities of mercury should be allowed stored on an interim basis at the National Defense Stockpile until a permanent retirement solution for commercial quantities of mercury can be found.

Sincerely,

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