



a toxics-free future

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International SAICM Implementation Project (ISIP)

In 2010, in an effort to demonstrate SAICM implementation via IPEN Participating Organizations, IPEN launched an International SAICM Implementation Project, also known as ISIP. ISIP aims to mobilize resources for initial enabling activities pertaining to national priorities, in keeping with the work areas set out in the strategic objectives of section IV of the SAICM Overarching Policy Strategy.

In particular, the ISIP supports the Governance objective of SAICM's Overarching Policy Strategy paragraph 26, which calls for enhanced "cooperation on the sound management of chemicals between Governments, the private sector and civil society at the national, regional and global levels."

In addition, ISIP builds on the 2008-2009 Global SAICM Outreach Campaign to raise awareness about SAICM and strengthen collaboration among the public interest, health and labor sectors.

ISIP Objectives

ISIP's four objectives include:

- Promoting the need for sound chemicals management
- Advancing National SAICM Implementation
- Promoting global SAICM implementation by global civil society
- Building capacity among NGOs developing countries and countries with economies in transition

Title of activity: Advocacy and Awareness Campaign on Mercury and Production of a Country Situation Report on Mercury

NGO: Centre for Environmental Justice

Country: Sri Lanka

Date: March 2011

Elements of SAICM Covered:

Promote reduction of the risks posed to human health and the environment (57); Help develop comprehensive national profiles or country situation reports about mercury (1, 166); Programs to monitor mercury to assess exposure (66, 82); Promote the development and use of products and processes that pose lesser risks (44); Take immediate action to reduce the risk to human health and the environment posed on a global scale by mercury in products and production processes (59); Participation in activities related to the negotiation of a legally binding instrument on mercury

Description of mercury that is available in the market:

Metal Mercury is readily available from most of the chemical agents in Pettah (Colombo 11). Anybody can buy any amount and the cost of 1 kg is about LKR 7000. Compact Fluorescent Lights (CFLs) are a common consumer product and as there is no collection or a safe handling methodology; damaged and broken items go to the domestic waste stream. Also, mercury-based medical appliances such as thermometers and BP apparatus are used in the hospitals and health care centers, and mercury amalgams are still used for tooth filling. A large quantity of Hg is also used in the Ayurvedic medicine by the Ayurvedic physicians in Sri Lanka.

Description of the most common forms of mercury exposure:

Accumulation of electronic waste is the key factor for mercury exposure. This has been proven by some scientific researchers, as the mercury contents around garbage dumps exceeded the permitted level. Other than that, CFLs and mercury-based medical equipments lead to considerable amounts of mercury exposure. Use of Ayurvedic medicine, school laboratory tests and dental fillings are also other forms of mercury exposure.

Description of human sources of mercury:

Haphazard disposal of waste is a major factor. Crushing of CFL bulbs and breakage of mercury thermometers in hospitals are some of the well known human activities that release Hg.

Description of the levels of mercury release and exposure:

No studies done.

Description of the damage caused by mercury:

Mercury threats are not yet reported.

Dr. Padmalal M. Manage, University of Sri Jayawardhanapura, has done a study around a major garbage dump in Navinna, close to Colombo. It revealed that the level of mercury in some well water and leafy vegetables has exceeded the permitted limit.

Communities living in close proximity of garbage dumps and waste collectors/pickers are more vulnerable. Ayurvedic physicians, dentists and school children are also vulnerable.

Description of the laws currently regulating mercury:

Using mercury is not banned or limited for any practice. However, there are industry specific standards to limit Hg and other heavy metals in the effluents as well as in the products.

Description of the efforts to deal with mercury:

According to the National Environmental Act, standards are given for the discharge of effluents into inland surface waters, tolerance limits for industrial effluents discharged on land for irrigation purpose and tolerance limits for industrial and domestic effluents discharged into marine coastal areas. The tolerance limits are 0.0005, 0.01 and 0.01 mg/l respectively.

After CEJ conducted its activities on mercury, the Central Environmental Authority proposed the development of a CFL collection mechanism with the Orange Electricals, which is a large scale CFLs assembler.

Also, the new paint standards published by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution after the CEJ/ Toxics Link campaign limits the Hg level to 100 mg/kg Maximum in enamel paints. New Toy paint standards limit the Hg level to 60 mg/kg Maximum.

Description of what forces support and oppose the Mercury Treaty, the public participation consultation process, and the level of public awareness of the treaty process:

According to our discussions, none of the public or professionals opposes the Treaty. There was no public consultation at all in Sri Lanka. The public is not much aware of the hazards of mercury. Almost all of the general public is not aware of the Mercury Treaty, at least they have not heard about it. Most people are not aware of the fact that CFLs contain mercury. However,

due to our campaign, now people are beginning to be aware of the danger of Hg, and the Government Medical Officers Association has agreed to introduce non-mercury alternatives for the health care sector.

Project Outcome:

Description of the activity conducted:

Information related to Mercury

Information on mercury is very little in the country. The importation data was collected from Sri Lanka Customs. Though mercury is imported, information about distribution and destinations are not available. Therefore, CEJ carried out a market survey base in Colombo. Here we found that there were main mercury sellers and some main buyers. This data helped us to prepare the country situation report which is in Annex I.

Testing

CEJ conducted several site visits to identify the possible mercury contaminated sites. During this process, researchers, university academics and scientists supported us. Five water samples were analyzed for mercury. The test reports are attached.

Six cosmetics samples were also analyzed and test reports are attached.

None of the water or cosmetic samples was found to be positive for mercury.

Apart from the above activities, CEJ conducted a baseline survey in selected hospitals on mercury-based appliances. As a result we found that there was no safe disposal of mercury-based appliances such as thermometers and BP apparatus. Once they are damaged, especially thermometers, the mercury evaporates and only the glassware is collected and disposed of. Survey results are given below:

Location	Number of beds	No of Thermometers available	No of Thermometers breakage (per year)
Private Hospital in Colombo	300	300	Approximately 60- 120
Public Hospital in Colombo	Over 1000	300	Approximately 250-300
Public hospital in Colombo suburban	230	150	Approximately 10-20

Awareness on Mercury

We produced a poster and brochures on mercury which are attached.

Almost all students and the majority of teachers were not aware that CFL bulbs contain mercury and they had just thrown the damaged bulbs into the household waste stream or buried them.

The workshops were conducted at St. Mathews' College, Anuruddha Balika Vidyalaya, Ratnawalie Balik Vidyalaya, C.W.W.Kannangara College, and Weluwana College in Colombo.

Following are the some photographs of the workshops.



Mobilize policy instruments

CEJ discussed with the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition the promotion of non-mercury alternatives such as digital thermometers and BP apparatus at least in one or two hospitals in the country. Also we have asked from WHO about the possibilities of providing such appliances. The objective of this is to introduce non-mercury products in at least a few Sri Lankan hospitals to reduce the risk. We also discussed with the Government Medical Officers Association the introduction of non-mercury alternatives and presently we are engaged in developing a proposal for the activity.

Impact on target groups:

Five workshops were conducted in schools to make the teachers and students aware of safe handling and preventive measures of mercury in school laboratories. We found that students were not aware of the danger.

School children raised questions such as, "What is the colour of Mercury?, Are they in solid form?, Can we buy from the market?, What are the adverse health impacts of Mercury?, Is it good to bury Mercury containing waste?" etc.

During the discussions students were made aware of the general information and characteristics of mercury and also the toxicity. Students were educated on the safe handling and use of mercury, and precautionary measures in case of a mercury spill. Materials regarding mercury were distributed.

Impact on target policies:

Due to the CEJ's involvement, the National Cleaner Production Centre and the Central Environmental Authority has initiated a collection of damaged or broken CFLs which is yet to be started in the near future. Presently we are working on the promotion of mercury-free alternatives for hospitals as a pilot project.

Outreach to stakeholders:

Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, Ministry of Environment, Central Environmental Authority, National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety, Sri Lanka Customs, Department of Import and Export Control, Waste Management Authority, Department of Education, University Academics and some Electrical and Electronic Companies are among the stakeholders.

Due to this initiation, CEJ is invited for the technical committee meetings of the relevant authorities to share our findings and experience. This creates a good platform to follow up as well as update the situation.

Deliverables, outputs and/or products:

- Poster - English
- Brochure - English

Communication efforts:

Awareness materials were distributed to the schools. We had 3 radio programs on mercury and lead. However there was no media coverage on the activities conducted or the impacts.

SAICM National Focal Point:

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Recommendations, from a public interest, NGO perspective, on reducing and eliminating human sources of mercury:

- Enact sufficient laws for minimizing and banning mercury importation unless it is for a specific purpose.
- Implement a Hg licensing and monitoring mechanism
- Follow up on the cycling of mercury throughout the country
- Raise awareness on health hazards and precautions