



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: Reduce & Eliminate & Replace Mercury in Healthcare Facilities

NGO: Environmental Protection & Sustainable Development Society

Country: Syria

Date: February 2011

Elements of SAICM Covered:

Participation in the collection, review, and assessment of existing information on information systems pertaining to chemicals in products including but not limited to regulations, standards and industry practices; Develop specific recommendations for actions to promote implementation of the Strategic Approach with regard to such information, incorporating identified priorities and access and delivery mechanisms; and follow up activities for the SAICM OEWG and ICMM3; Promote the use of safe and effective alternatives, including non-chemical alternatives to organic chemicals that are highly toxic, persistent and bioaccumulative; Promote the development and use of products and processes that pose lesser risks; Articles and products containing hazardous substances should all be accompanied by relevant information for users, workplaces and at disposal sites; Promote provision of information for all chemicals in commerce, including appropriate information detailing their inherent hazards should be made

available to the public at no charge and generated where needed with essential health, safety and environmental information made available (ICCM2 decision II/4, GPA items 54, 44, 108,111)

Description of the specific product(s) and chemical(s) related to the activity:

Mercury in healthcare facilities & dental amalgam

Description of the toxic effects of the chemicals contained in the product(s):

- Mercury is a highly toxic heavy metal, especially when metabolized into methyl mercury. It may be fatal if inhaled and harmful if absorbed through the skin; the inhaled mercury vapour is absorbed in the blood through the lungs. It may cause harmful effects to the nervous, digestive, respiratory and immune systems, and to the kidneys.
- Health-care facilities are one of the main sources of mercury release into the atmosphere.
- For health care, these include blood pressure devices, gastrointestinal devices, thermometers, barometers, and the use of mercury fixatives uses in labs.
- Dental amalgam is the most commonly used dental filling material.

Description of how consumers are exposed to these toxic chemicals:

Some consumers have mercury blood pressure devices and mercury thermometers. They will invariably break, and consumers aren't aware enough about how to deal with the mercury waste of broken thermometers or broken blood pressure devices. The disposal of mercury medical waste would be in municipal waste or medical waste- if this waste is burned or incinerated mercury vapor is released to atmosphere. Mercury may be fatal if inhaled, and mercury vapour is absorbed in the blood through the lungs. It may cause harmful effects to their nervous, digestive, respiratory, immune systems and to their kidneys. Dental amalgam release mercury into the human body whenever still in a person's mouth.

Description of how the product waste that contains the hazardous chemical(s) is handled:

When mercury blood pressure devices or thermometers break, people should leave the room immediately and open all the windows. After more than 5 hours, someone wearing protective clothes (from head to the foot) should gather the spilled mercury and broken device gently, then put them in special carton / isolated box, and then give it to responsible authority to get rid of it. A vacuum cleaner should not be used for cleaning in this case.

Description of what information (or level of information) is available to consumers about the toxic chemicals in the product:

- We had round table with some consumers, hospital staff, NGOs and media, and we discussed mercury toxicity and how it is present in products like thermometers, sphygmomanometers and dental amalgam, and others like fluorescent lamps. We also discussed how they should behave when one of these devices breaks , and how they can get rid of the mercury containing equipment safely.
- They had very little knowledge about how to deal with mercury toxicity and were happy to have such information.

Description of what types of similar products are available on the market, including safer alternatives:

- Electronic **Sphygmomanometers**
- Air pressure **Sphygmomanometers**
- Electronic **thermometers**
- Alcohol **thermometers**
- Cobosit **Dental filling**
- Ceramic **Dental filling**

Project Outcomes:

Description of the activity conducted:

- 1- We conducted a major workshop with Al Akram Red Crescent Medical Center, which the society has a good connection with. Together with the leadership of the Syrian Red Crescent committee, all of the medical center staff and leadership, NGOs and media discussed sound management of mercury; environmental promotion; and choosing mercury-free alternative health-care equipment and materials as a must, keeping in mind the coming international treaty on mercury in 2013.
- 2- Finally we decided we must have a commitment with the Syrian Red Crescent leadership and with Al Akram Medical Center leadership, to replace mercury medical equipment and materials with mercury-free alternatives.
- 3- A signed statement with these decisions and a plan is decided as follows:
 - > We made an inventory of mercury-containing equipment in the Medical Center (**thermometers, sphygmomanometers**, dental filling material that is a mixture of mercury and a metal alloy);
 - > We looked for reliable mercury free devices (**sphygmomanometers**- Riester / Germany; electronic **thermometers** Riester / Germany)
 - > We matched with the budget for purchasing
 - > We decided upon a date to replace the mercury **thermometers** (6 electronic **thermometers**) 25/11/2010
 - > We decided upon a date to replace mercury **sphygmomanometers** (8 air pressure **sphygmomanometers**) 25/11/2010
 - > We took all equipment to be replaced, gathered them in a special box and delivered to the Ministry of Environment to get rid of them on 25/11/2010
 - > We made a commitment with the health care center that the dental department will no longer use amalgam filling

Impact on target groups:

It was impressive, because all the doctors, staff, NGOs, and media were very supportive about having a mercury-free health care center, and they decided to help other health care centers to be mercury-free.

Impact on target policies:

They were also supportive because the society helping in awareness rising in very important health & environmental issue, so they contribute with a lecture about the governmental effort in monitoring all forms and sources of mercury pollution and approach the economic activities policy to phase out mercury use & they will improve & urge national academic & research centers to priorities mercury research.

Outreach to stakeholders:

Health care professionals and staff, NGOs, private sector (medical firms), representatives of government and media. They all made their own commitments to providing mercury-free alternative health care equipment and materials, in their daily usage, and to promote that.

Deliverables, outputs and/or products:

1. Report, including public awareness about mercury toxicity and its impact on health and the environment.
2. Report, including the governmental effort to address mercury pollution and the policy to phase out mercury use.
3. Brochure, shows the mercury polluted hot spots and their impacts on health and the environment.
4. Articles about mercury toxicity and its impact on health and the environment.

Communication efforts:

The head of the Society, Mr. Naeim Kaddah, had a 5 minute radio interview. He talked about the Society's activities, especially on the mercury project, and about mercury toxicity.

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NGO Recommendations for next steps:

Raising funds for such an important project; because we wanted to let all people know about mercury toxicity, by using more media and long term advertisement, but the project budget were very limited.