

Regional consultation on mercury

The Governing Council, at its 24th meeting, acknowledged the progress made on mercury, however concluded that further long-term international action is required to reduce risks to human health and the environment. For this reason, the options of enhanced voluntary measures and new or existing international legal instruments are to be reviewed and assessed in order to make progress in addressing this issue.

To this end, the Governing Council established an ad-hoc open ended working group of Governments, regional economic integration organizations and stakeholder representatives to review and assess options for enhanced voluntary measures and new or existing legal instruments.

The first meeting of the open ended working group was held in Bangkok from 12 to 16 November 2007. The report of the first meeting of the open ended working group is available at the mercury website at <http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/OEWG/Documents.htm>. As part of the meeting, a submission was made by the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries on regional priorities, cross-cutting issues and key principles for addressing the global mercury issue (attached as Annex III to the report).

At the first meeting of the open ended working group, the group of Latin American and Caribbean countries asked the secretariat about the possibility of organizing a brief consultation in conjunction with the planned SAICM meeting in Panama in February. This was seen as an opportunity for the region to discuss mercury issues of particular relevance, and also to prepare for the second working group on mercury, scheduled for 6 to 10 October 2008. Following this request, time has been made available for this consultation, including support for attendance and the provision of translation facilities.

In order to prepare for the second meeting of the OEWG in the most effective way, the regional group may wish to further consider their submission to the first OEWG (as referenced above), discuss the intersessional work program set out in Annex II of the report of OEWG 1, and consider the options available to address the global mercury issue, as set out in the options study presented to OEWG 1 (UNEP(DTIE)/Hg/OEWG.1/2). It should be noted that the range of options for legally binding measures has been narrowed to focus on the development of a new protocol under the Stockholm Convention or a new stand-alone legally binding instrument, as other options presented were not felt to address all of the challenges posed by mercury.

As this is a regional consultation, no formal agenda for this consultation has been developed by the UNEP Mercury Programme secretariat. The secretariat would, however, like to remind the participants of the requests sent for information and assistance. The early submission of this information will allow it to be included in the material presented, and ensure an accurate reflection of the situation in the region for consideration and further discussion.