Towards a better understanding of global mercury supply and trade

Enhancing the HS to support environmentally sustainable trade
25 October 2022

Jacqueline Alvarez, Chief of Chemicals and Health Branch, Economy Division, UNEP
Source: UNEP Global Mercury Supply, Trade and Demand Report 2017
Mercury export ban in European Union (2011) and United States (2013) → Reduced volume of mercury from traditional sources, including chloralkali industry → Mercury price increase

Primary mercury mining increases in Mexico and Indonesia (with production estimate at 800-1100 tonnes in 2015) → Overall increase of mercury supply from 2005 to 2015

Chlor-alkali production has declined

Demand for mercury-added products has slightly decreased

Demand in ASGM has increased (in Africa, Asia and Latin America)

Overall increase in global demand for mercury from 2005 to 2015

Overall increase of the ASGM activity due to, among other factors:
- Relatively high market price of gold
- Lack of other economic opportunities in rural areas

Mercury trading hubs have moved from previous Spanish and Dutch ports to Singapore and Hong Kong, and to lesser extent Turkey and Vietnam

In some cases, legal mercury trade subjected to additional scrutiny

Mercury shipments not always recorded correctly and shared with COMTRADE

Increase in illegal mercury trade

Global mercury trade difficult to track and measure

Forseen challenges with managing mercury trade and implementation of the Minamata Convention

Illegal Trade

Observations

Increased scrutiny on mercury trade leads to increased illegal flows

Most illegal trade in mercury is for ASGM use

About half of all mercury used in ASGM is estimated to be traded illegally (and in some countries approaching 100%)

Common strategies for illegal mercury trade:
- Falsifying documents by declaring the wrong classification of goods
- Transporting mercury without documentation
- Double invoicing.
- Smuggling through unauthorized ports of entry
- Disguising mercury within shipments of uncontrolled goods
Illegal Trade

Recommendations

Reduce demand for mercury by promoting mercury-free ASGM

Monitoring and reporting of mercury movements from source to end use and disposal need to be further improved so that the organizations charged with enforcing trade regulations are better informed

Further research into the nexus of gold mining, the trade in mercury and transnational organized crime.

Increase enforcement capacity, for example by:
• Criminal and civil liabilities or penalties along the entire illegal supply chain
• Seizures of property or equipment used to conduct illegal activities
Information Resources

- Global mercury supply, trade and demand
- Quick Start Guide for managing mercury trade in artisanal and small scale gold mining
- THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN CHEMICALS
- OPENING THE BLACK BOX: LOCAL INSIGHTS INTO THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL GLOBAL MERCURY TRADE REVEALED

GLOBAL MERCURY PARTNERSHIP
Thank you

Jacqueline Alvarez
UNEP
Jacqueline.alvarez@un.org

United Nations Avenue, Gigiri
PO Box 30552 – 00100 GPO Nairobi, Kenya

www.unep.org