

MERCURY FREE CRAFT GOLD WASHING

MINERS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON THE DANGER ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF MERCURY.

DATE : MARCH 2015

PLACE : GOLD PANNING SITE
OF SAKDJE AND MBOUKMA

IDENTIFICATION OF MERCURY

1°) What is mercury?

At room temperature, elemental mercury is a liquid, silver-colored heavy metal. It becomes gaseous when heated from 356.58 ° C.

It takes both organic and inorganic forms in the environment.

2°) How is mercury used in the gold panning site?

Mercury combines with gold to form an amalgam that facilitates separation of gold from the rock, sand or other materials. The amalgam is then heated to vaporize the mercury and keep only the gold.

DANGERS LINKED TO THE UTILIZATION OF MERCURY

3°) Why is mercury a dangerous product for miners and their family?

- Mercury is a hazardous chemical to the environment and highly toxic.
- It can cause brain, nerve, kidney and lung damage and, in extreme cases, coma or death.
- It is carcinogenic, harmful to reproduction, and interferes with the development of children.

4°) What is the environmental impact of the use of mercury in artisanal mining of gold?

- Water and sediment pollution;
- Ecosystem contamination;
- Air pollution by mercury vapor;
- Plant contamination.



MODE OF INTOXICATION BY THE MERCURY

5°) How are we exposed to mercury in artisanal gold mining activities?

- Inhalation of mercury vapor in the air from burning amalgam.
- Exposure via oral ingestion or consumption of food contaminated with mercury.
- Through the skin.

6°) When mercury is present, at what point is there a risk of poisoning for humans?

- A mass of 10 mg of mercury is enough to contaminate 10,000 liters of water for consumption;
- The limit of mercury in the air is around 0.2 mg / m³.
- The ingestion of a small drop of mercury is fatal.

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SYMPTOMS OF HUMAN POISONING BY MERCURY

7°) What are the symptoms of illnesses caused by mercury?

- **Acute exposure:** flu, fever, body aches, dry throat, headache;
- **Chronic exposure:** slight tremor of the fingers, hands and lips, fatigue, insomnia, lack of appetite, memory loss.

MEASURES TO REDUCE MERCURY USE AND EXPOSURE TO THIS SUBSTANCE IN HANDICRAFT GOLD-WASHING SITES.

8°) What can the mining communities do to reduce the use of and exposure to mercury?

- **Alternatives to the whole ore amalgamation:** panning, gravity separation;
- **Precautions:** wear gloves, boots, nose masks, waste management;
- **Mercury alternatives:** using methods that do not require the use of mercury.

9°) Why ban mercury in gold mining sites?

- **Mercury is considered by WHO as one of the ten chemicals of extreme concern to public health;**
- **In the artisanal gold-washing sites, mercury is poorly used and presents dangers for people and the environment.**

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES ON PROHIBITION OF MERCURY IN ARTISANAL GOLD-WASHING ACTIVITIES

- **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants;**
- **Minamata Convention on Mercury adopted in October 2013 with the goal of protecting human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions of mercury and mercury compounds "(Article1)"**



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WHAT CAMEROONIAN LAW SAYS ABOUT ARTISANAL GOLD MINING OPERATIONS

- **Mining Legislation: Law No. 001 of 16 April 2001 on the Mining Code;**
- **Chapter I of Title III, art.24 31 - Mining Code on Artisanal Mining.**
- **Chapter V of Title V, Art.85 to 88- Mining code on environmental protection.**

WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT AND HEALTH SERVICES DO ABOUT THE PROBLEM

- **Adopt measures to legalize artisanal mining and small-scale activities;**
- **Provide assistance (through education, training and health care) to miners and their families;**
- **Encourage and help communities organize to produce and put on the gold market "clean," high-value products.**

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