



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: Tunisia Mercury Situation Report

NGO: Association pour la Protection de l'Environnement et Developpement Durable de Bizerte (APEDDUB)

Country: Tunisia

Date: February, 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:

In Tunisia, mercury is available in medical products (thermometers, pressure meters, and manometers), industrial products (piles, batteries, screens, economic lamps) and pharmaceutical products (vaccines, some skin salves).

Description of the most common forms of mercury exposure:

Tunisia is not a producer of mercury. It is only an importer and user of this metal. So, only workers in mercury manufacturing companies, dentists, doctors, nurses and mercury products users are exposed.

Description of human sources of mercury:

Many human activities release mercury into the environment:

- * British gas station
- * Companies that manufacture piles and batteries
- * Companies that manufacture cement (use of heavy fuels)
- * Companies that manufacture chlor-alkali in Kasserine (a locality in west of Tunisia), which releases the maximum amount of mercury into the environment
- * Central pharmacy (medicine fabrication)
- * Inappropriate manipulation of mercury wastes and products.

Description of the levels of mercury release and exposure:

Unfortunately, there is not a database of mercury in Tunisia. So, little information is recorded and available at the national level.

Description of the damage caused by mercury:

Some studies of mercury in some sites are carried out. They showed these results:

- * Sporadic cases of accidental mercury intoxications to workers.
- * One case of family intoxication by using vacuum-cleaner to clean up a mercury spill.
- * No food and/or fish contaminations were proven via the analysis and controls.
- * No air contamination in cement manufacturers is noted (use of clean technology).
- * Only the contamination of the site of chlor-alkali manufacturer has been proven. But now, the factory has stopped using mercury and replaced it with new and clean technology.

The government is preparing a big project to clean the contaminated site. No information about human intoxication is available.

So, the vulnerable groups to mercury exposure are:

- * workers in mercury manufacturers
- * dentists (use of amalgam), doctors and nurses
- * laboratory and pharmacy workers
- * workers in dumpsites
- * all users of mercury products

Description of the laws currently regulating mercury:

In Tunisia, there many laws limiting and banning the use of mercury:

- * Water legislation: - total mercury concentration is limited to 0.001mg/l (Norm NT 106.02 for worn water, Norm NT 09.13 for food water and potable water)
- urgent decontamination measures for hydraulic sites are available (bathing water quality Norm NT 09.11)
 - * Soil protection legislation: inorganic mercury concentration is limited to 36mg/kg and organic mercury concentration is limited to 4mg/kg (law n° 95-70 of 17/07/1995).
 - * No air legislation is available
 - * Waste management legislation (waste incineration legislation): - interdiction of waste incineration in the open (only in authorized establishment), law n° 96-41 of 10/06/1996
- Interdiction of use of wastes as a combustible (with the exception of vegetal wastes), Hg concentration in incineration air is limited to 0.0005mg/m³.

- * Food and health safety legislation: maximum levels for certain Hg contaminants in foodstuffs are limited to 0.5 10⁻⁶ g, and in seafood to 0.5 10⁻⁶g.
- * Other legislations: batteries and accumulators containing certain dangerous substances(Hg), decree n° 2005-3395 of 26/12/2005. The concentration of mercury is not limited. Mercury is classified as the n°2 cause of professional diseases caused by toxic mineral substances (decree of 10/01/1995).

Description of the efforts to deal with mercury:

The government has taken some actions to reduce mercury exposure:

- A Tunisian / Korean project has been signed to create an infrastructure to recuperate and recycle electric and electronic wastes, with the goal to recuperate mercury (economic lamps, piles and batteries) and other metals.
- Reduction of the mercury importation (2007: 40kg / 2008: 20kg / 2009: 1kg).
- The Ministry of Environment has elaborated a strategy to control air quality by using specific logistics to measure the quantity of mercury in air, and to control water quality in continental and maritime water (decree n° 90-2273 of 25/12/1990) and in water resources (creation of national network to control water resources).
- The Ministry of Health is charged to control foodstuffs with a MEDPOL program
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Fishing is charged with controlling mercury in seafood.
- Control mercury emission (project of decree)
- Stopping the use of mercury in the chlor-alkali factory of Kasserine and implementation of new and clean technology (membrane technology).
- Interdiction to use mercury in piles and batteries.
- Preparation of a law to limit the use of mercury in the fabrication of fluorescent lamps.
- Control of mercury levels in human blood in some exposure sites

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:

The national agency of waste management launched a national public awareness-raising campaign to collect piles batteries and economic lamps in the future, in schools and universities in all of Tunisia. The objective of this campaign is to recuperate and recycle, and to raise awareness about the threat of mercury and other heavy metals.

Project Outcome:

Description of the activity conducted:

Our activities consisted of:

- 1- Local conference in the city of Bizerte: This showed the impact and damage of mercury to health and the environment via three presentations.
 - * The first presentation was titled "Impact of Mercury to Environment" and presented by Mm Dhekra Gharbi from the environment ministry.
 - * The second presentation was titled "Impact of Mercury to Health" and was presented by Dr. Tarak Barhoumi from the health ministry.
 - * The third presentation was titled "The Important Role of Civil Society to the Public Awareness-Raising" and presented by Dr. Fethi Khayech, President of the Association of Health and Environment.
 160 persons participated in this conference (teachers, pupils, students, doctors, dentists, nurses, those responsible for children, industrial workers and journalists).
- 2- Presentations in many schools (environment clubs) and children's clubs in the city of Bizerte, presented by Dr. Najwa Bourawi, President of APEDDUB.
- 3- Posters, stickers and folders are posted in local schools, universities and hospitals.

4- Launching of local campaign to collect mercury products (thermometers, piles, batteries, economic and fluorescent lamps) in local schools and children's clubs.

Impact on target groups:

In this project, the target groups chosen were students, pupils, teachers, dentists, doctors, nurses, industrial workers and journalists.

Impact on target policies:

The results of the activities are very interesting:

- * Many dentists are stopping the use of amalgam and the regional hospital of CNSS in Bizerte is stopping the purchase of mercury-containing products.
- * Students and pupils are engaged to collect the maximum amount of mercury-containing products (economic and fluorescent lamps, piles, batteries).
- * All sensitized persons have decided to stop using and buying cheaper piles and batteries and will not use a vacuum-cleaner when products containing mercury are broken.

Outreach to stakeholders:

Many stakeholders and sectors were engaged in these activities:

- * Health Ministry (local health guidance)
- * Environment Ministry (local environment guidance)
- * Education Ministry (local education guidance)
- * Childhood Ministry (local childhood guidance)
- * Municipality of Metline (locality of Bizerte)

Two relationships were signed between APEDDUB and the municipality of Metline and APEDDUB and the local childhood guidance in Bizerte.

Deliverables, outputs and/or products:

The regional hospital of CNSS in Bizerte has stopped buying products that contain mercury.

A brochure was created.

Communication efforts:

Media participated in our activities and two local newspapers (Canal, Oxygen) and one national newspaper (Chourouk) are engaged to diffuse information about our activities and to help us to extend our public awareness-raising campaign.

An interview with the president of APEDDUB, Dr. Najwa Bourawi, was done by the local radio station SFAX. She explained the health and environmental impacts of mercury and how to prevent mercury exposure. She also encouraged citizens to collect products that contain mercury for safe disposal.

SAICM National Focal Point:

Mr. Abdelhay Sghaier, general secretariat of the Mediterranean Network of Sustainable Development Association (AREMEDD).

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

- * Reinforcement and generalization of the campaign to collect mercury products in all local schools, children's clubs and hospitals in Bizerte by installation of dustbins.
- * Installation of big dustbins in all entries of Tunisian cities to sensitize citizens.
- * Distribution of stickers and folders and posting of posters in all national institutions, hospitals, mercury factories and commercial centres.

- * Diffuse advertising in media (TV, Radio, Newspapers).
- * Doing competitions for pupils and students about the impacts of mercury to health and the environment, and distribution of prizes in all institutions.
- * Prepare a pilot health project titled "Green Hospital" to encourage use of medical materials without mercury.
- * Distribute folders and posters about prevention of mercury exposure and alternatives to mercury products.
- * Encourage Tunisian researches to do studies about mercury and diffuse them.
- * Extend this project to national and regional public awareness activities.