



a toxics-free future

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IPEN intervention on contaminated sites

Given by Lee Bell

Thank you, Mr. President,

Mercury contaminated sites represent a significant environmental and human health risk across the globe. Past estimates suggest that over 3,000 identified sites were contributing to atmospheric, terrestrial and aquatic mercury pollution. The reality is that number is now much higher. The majority of sites where ASGM is conducted with mercury will eventually be declared contaminated sites. These represent both a historical legacy and a contemporary issue. Each new site occupied by ASGM activities is likely to be a contaminated site in the creation. As we know there are hundreds of new sites opened to this activity every year, representing the legacy sites of the future.

Our ability to identify and manage contaminated sites has improved significantly over the last 50 years; however, it is telling that countries such as the United States and Australia are still struggling to manage mercury contaminated areas created during the gold rushes of the 1800's. Despite our technological and practical advances, the sheer number of sites created in an ongoing basis is outstripping our ability to remediate them in terms of capacity and resources. This is especially true for developing countries and countries in economic transition, who are least well equipped financially and technologically to manage them.

The two clear strategies to address this problem are to firstly stop the creation of these sites, and secondly to provide the necessary support to manage existing sites. To address the first issue, we must stop the trade in mercury that is used for ASGM. IPEN is calling on all Parties to go beyond the requirements of the Convention and seriously consider announcing full bans on the export and import of mercury. The US and the EU have accomplished this without adverse effects on their economies and for many countries this would amount to a political formality. In the last 4 years, with the support from the GEF and various donors, miners in many countries have already moved away from mercury. Acceleration of a global ban in mercury exports

is the quickest, most efficient way to prevent the creation of new contaminated sites.

Secondly, we must provide clear and effective guidance to Parties on identification and management of contaminated sites that lead to remediation and reduced human and environmental exposure. The COP has been slow to develop such guidance and its development was unnecessarily delayed at previous meetings. However, the process has now begun, and draft guidance is under development. The draft guidance has a solid foundation but needs further refinement and would specifically benefit from detailed attention to the identification and management of ASGM sites, which differ from many industrial sites managed in the developed nations. We would urge the expert group to focus on this matter and to accelerate progress of the guidance development to ensure it is available for adoption at COP 3.

In closing, we should remain cognisant that guidance and export bans alone will not be enough to deal with legacy sites. Funding mechanisms of the Convention must remain open to activities to identify, manage and remediate mercury contaminated sites to protect communities, the environment and the food chain. Removing such resources will ensure that human and environmental exposure will grow and intensify.

Thank you.