New Minamata disease discovery in ASGM hotspots (II)

Severe mercury poisoning symptoms are seen in many communities within ASGM hotspots, ranging from tremors to birth defects similar to Minamata disease. To identify the severity of mercury poisoning, BaliFokus in cooperation with experts from the University Hospital of Munich - LMU, employed simple tests and conducted training for local health workers which will allow them to assess people suspected of suffering from such poisoning.

Source and photo credit: BaliFokus Foundation.

Mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants.

Source and photo credit: Ecological Alert and Recovery - Thailand (EARTH)

A set of tests conducted in order to identify the mercury poisoning symptoms includes the matchbox test. The respondent is put in a dark room and asked to open a matchbox. Then the assessor times it with a stop watch. Most mercury poisoned people are unable to perform the test in less than 17 seconds.

Source and photo credit: EARTH

A local farmer and heavy smoker is suffering from mercury poisoning for the past 10 years. His health has deteriorated to the point where he can no longer drive his tractor and suffers dizziness, headaches, and memory loss. His wife left him after he started experiencing headaches, but still visits him to help him with his chores.

Tuhanda, 45, a farmer and a part-time stone crusher. In the last 4 years his health has quickly degenerated. He could not walk properly, failed the ataxia test, and suffers from tremors. His wife left him when he started experiencing tremors, and he now lives with his mother, 70, who must cook and care for him.

Ocih, 63, a housewife and a mother-of-three. For the past 9 years, Ocih has suffered from severe tremors, sleeping disturbances, and muscle aches requiring her to have help with tasks. Her daughter got married to avoid her mother and still visits to bathe her and cook meals.

Kustin, 45, a gold burner and heavy smoker, is mother of Dita. Kustin has been burning amalgam for the last 10 years. She suffers from tremors, loss of memory, and dizziness. Their neighbours take turn helping out with their chores, including feeding the family.

In Tha Tum rural municipality, Prachinburi, Thailand, coal-fired power plants consume at least 700,000 tons of coal every year, and steam power to one of the world’s largest pulp and paper production plants in the country. They also supply energy to over 130 other factories within the 304 Industrial Complex. Residents, however, claim fly ash is added to the soil on surrounding eucalyptus plantations. Company representatives counter that fly ash only comes from biomass burned at the power plant.

Chuchat Kaysorn, 47, a local farmer has a hair mercury level of 12.76 ppm. For ten years, he lived and worked next to a coal-fired power plant. His daughter confirmed his major source of exposure was fish contaminated by mercury coming from the coal-fired power plant.