

CONTAMINATED SITES: COP 3 ADOPT THE GUIDANCE!

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MERCURY CONTAMINATED SITES

Decision MC-2/8 on Contaminated Sites invited parties to continue to comment on the guidance being developed for adoption at COP 3 during the intersessional period. There has been extensive comment and revision of the guidance from the expert group, parties and others. There is an urgency to adopt the guidance in order to allow many developing countries, especially those with ASGM activity, to take action to address contaminated sites to prevent exposure of populations and ecosystems to this toxic metal. While the guidance that has been developed to date is a solid foundation for action to identify and assess sites, it lacks a strategic focus on ASGM site clean-up.

ASGM activity is driving a rapid increase in mercury contaminated sites that are contributing to atmospheric emissions, contamination of waterways and poisoning of the aquatic food chain. The mercury supply to ASGM must be stopped in order to prevent a massive increase in the number of contaminated sites requiring clean-up on a global scale at great expense. ASGM sites are also some of the most difficult sites to remediate due to re-

moteness, on-site populations, urban integration and even commercial premises such as gold shops. Allowing the continued use of mercury in ASGM is driving the global proliferation of mercury contaminated sites. All parties should be encouraged to adopt the contaminated sites guidance at COP 3 to allow many countries to take immediate assessment action. Thereafter the guidance should be subject to regular review and the small specific subsection on ASGM-related sites should be expanded significantly at the earliest opportunity. The guidance would also benefit from case studies of successful ASGM site remediation. IPEN has submitted detailed information on this issue and some has been included in the draft guidance. In addition IPEN has created a detailed guide to management and remediation of mercury contaminated sites which has been recommended by Norway as a very useful guide for parties.

Some estimates suggest that there are more than 3,000 mercury contaminated sites globally causing localised contamination, but also releasing an estimated 82 tonnes of mercury into the atmosphere and another 116 tonnes being washed into waterways and surrounding landscapes by rainfall

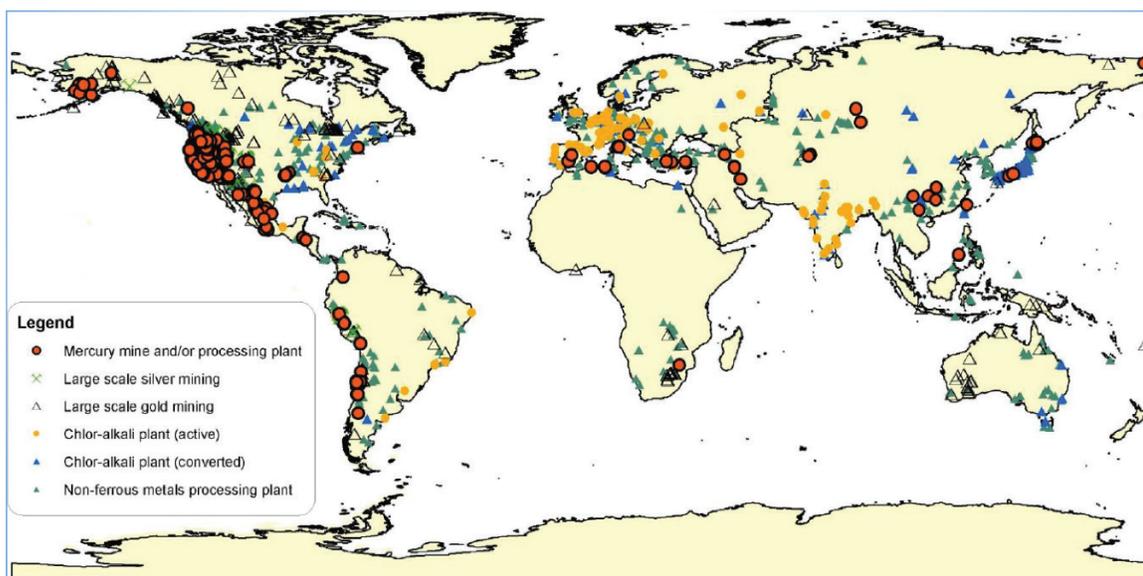


Figure 1. Global mercury contaminated sites. Source: Kocman et al 2013.

(Kocman et al 2013). As ASGM increases the amount of emissions and releases continues to grow.

Mercury contaminated sites are caused by a range of industries and mercury uses including:

- Mercury mining and cinnabar distillation;
- Chlor-alkali plants
- Large-scale precious metal processing
- Artisanal and small-scale gold mining – amalgamation and mercury/cyanidation combination

- Non-ferrous metal production
- Oil and gas production and refining facilities
- Acetaldehyde production
- Vinyl chloride and vinyl acetate production
- Urban landfill and open burning sites.

Adoption of the contaminated sites guidance at COP 3 will accelerate the ability of many parties to identify contaminated sites, assess the contamination and take actions to reduce human exposure, protect people's health and reduce environmental contamination.



Figure 2. Mercury contaminated ball mill site, Indonesia. Photos: Lee Bell, IPEN



Figure 3. Mercury contaminated cyanidation plant in Indonesia. Tailings stockpiles, liquid releases, emissions from roasted activated carbon laden with gold, mercury and cyanide. Contaminated tailings were given away as construction material. Photos: Lee Bell, IPEN

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