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## Government & Policy

# Mercury Export Ban

## House Panel Approves Bill To Eliminate U.S. Exports By 2010

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U.S. exports of elemental mercury would be banned starting in 2010 under legislation approved by a House panel on Oct. 30.

The bill, H.R. 1534, would require the [Energy Department](#) to store the mercury from the mining industry and from chlor-alkali plants that used mercury cells. It also would prohibit the sale of mercury by the U.S. government.

The measure is designed to help stem the flow of commodity-grade mercury from industrialized countries to the developing world. In developing countries, millions of small-scale miners use the liquid metal to separate gold from sand. Mercury poisons the miners, including children, and also contaminates land and waterways where gold is extracted. In addition, mercury is released into the atmosphere when gold-mercury amalgam is heated, often in open pans, to release the precious metal.

The [House Energy & Commerce Committee](#) approved the measure 45–2. Before the vote, the committee amended the bill to require DOE to designate a facility to store mercury from the private sector after the ban takes effect. The amended bill would allow DOE to charge companies a fee for storing their mercury.

The amendment, hammered out by Democrats and Republicans, replaced a provision that would have set up a stakeholder group to recommend options for mercury storage. Lawmakers came up with the plan to have DOE accept the liquid metal for storage after they consulted with the industry organizations the [American Chemistry Council](#), the [Chlorine Institute](#), and the [National Mining Association](#), as well as with the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), an advocacy group, and the [Environmental Council of the States](#), a coalition of states' top environmental regulators.

[Rep. Thomas Allen](#) (D-Maine), sponsor of the bill, says H.R. 1534 "will allow the chlor-alkali industry to place into safe storage the roughly 1,500 tons of mercury still being used at aging plants. It will also allow the mining industry to store the approximately 50 to 100 tons of mercury it generates annually as a by-product."

[Rep. Marsha Blackburn](#) (R-Tenn.), who voted against the bill, says she fears that the private sector's mercury will end up at DOE's Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn. At the Y-12 complex, DOE currently stores 1,206 metric tons of mercury, which was used during the Cold War to produce enriched lithium for atomic weapons.

Blackburn says she believes that centralized national storage of mercury at Y-12 could compromise security at the facility.

<http://pubs.acs.org/cen/news/85/i45/8545news5.html>