

Overview and Background on HR 1534, the Mercury Export Ban Act of 2007 (see: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1534>)

As you may know, the collection of mercury has led to a surplus in the U.S., which can now be legally sold to the highest bidder anywhere in the world. Unfortunately, most of this mercury goes to developing countries, where its uses are not controlled, and where it is often used in very polluting applications, such as small scale gold mining. The pollution created in these countries can travel right back to U.S., directly undermining our efforts to control mercury in rivers, streams, lakes and fish.

As we continue with our efforts to reduce the uses of mercury and control mercury pollution sources, we need the federal government to act to “close the loop,” and prevent the resulting surplus mercury from entering global trade, and put it into safe storage instead. We know that US Department of Defense and US Department of Energy already store their surplus mercury as a matter of policy; this policy must be made permanent, and private sector stocks must also be stored.

To address this, in March 2007, Representative Allen (D-ME) introduced HR 1534, the Mercury Export Ban Act of 2007, to address this important issue. This bill codifies US DOD’s and US DOE’s policy to store mercury, rather than sell it, and also prohibits the export of private mercury stocks. The bill bans the export of surplus mercury and also requires the Department of Energy to accept private sector contributions of surplus mercury. (A companion bill was also introduced in the US Senate by Senators Obama and Murkowski, see: http://obama.senate.gov/press/070315-obama_murkowski/)

Background

Mercury is a particularly troubling toxic pollutant to women and mothers, because it is highly toxic to a child’s developing nervous system.

The best known source of mercury pollution is coal fired power plants, which is, in fact, one of the very largest sources of mercury pollution in the U.S. Coal fired power plants are the focus of the Clear Skies Initiative as well as the recent controversy on EPA mercury rules.

However, it’s important also to focus on an equally important but largely overlooked source of the problem: **international sources of mercury pollution**. These international pollution sources come from the intentional use of mercury in a number of products and industrial processes in ways that cause substantial pollution.

Mercury pollution travels globally. This means that mercury escaping from outdated chemical factories in countries like India can easily turn up in fish here in the U.S. So, we need to worry about international sources for the sake of our own health, not just for health of others in the developing world.

But the United States has not done enough to address international sources of mercury pollution.

While US States, industries and others carefully collect mercury from recycled products, ironically the mercury is often sold to overseas markets, where it is often used in dangerous and highly dispersive ways.

One way for the US to act is to “close the loop” on the mercury collected in our own borders, and prohibit the export of mercury from the US to the world market.

While US DOD and US DOE have voluntarily chosen to store rather than sell their large stores of mercury, we have no law against selling surplus mercury into the global market, where it is usually destined for countries in the developing world

The United States should be a global leader in the effort to reduce mercury pollution. To encourage this to happen, we are asking you vote for the mercury export ban bill (HR1534) which will prevent the export of all elemental mercury from the US. This legislation would “close the loop” on mercury exports and require proper management of our own mercury within US borders.