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### Toxic Dumping: Destination India

**New Delhi, November 4, 2003:** India has earned the dubious distinction of becoming the biggest consumer in the world of a highly toxic and deadly substance: mercury. What's more appalling, while the world is dumping mercury on us, we have neither bothered to regulate its trade and use, nor inventorise its stocks in the country.

Imports of mercury to India have registered a six-fold increase in seven years: this has been brought to light by recently released data of the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S), Kolkata. While the world is phasing out mercury and mercury products, we are phasing them in. At a Conference on Mercury Pollution in India organised on November 3, 2003 in New Delhi by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Sunita Narain, Director, CSE said that this data emphatically pointed to only one thing: that India was rapidly becoming the world's most preferred toxic dump for mercury.

According to the DGCI&S, between 1996 and 2002,

- Mercury imports to India more than doubled from 254 tonnes to 531 tonnes
- Organomercury compound (pesticides, slimicides etc) imports increased a whopping 1,500 times from 0.7 tonnes to 1,312 tonnes
- Imports of mercury containing products increased – for instance, mercury vapour lamp imports rose from 2,100 to 0.12 million and thermostat imports increased from 1.73 million to 2.51 million
- Total imports of mercury and mercury compounds thus jumped from 285 tonnes to 1,858 tonnes – more than six times in seven years

Because of this dramatic rise in imports, India has now outstripped the US in mercury consumption. The total mercury consumed by the US in 1997-98 was 346 tonnes; US Geological Survey reports register a declining trend in use from 1999 to 2003. In India, current mercury consumption ranges between 1,350-1,843 tonnes per annum. This is **50 per cent** of the mercury produced in the world. India also processes nearly **70 per cent** of the world's mercury. We have become a willing buyer for this toxin (see *table for the major exporters of mercury to India*).

The scenario becomes murkier when we consider the state of regulations and inventories in India. According to available data that CSE has studied

- Only about .2 per cent of the mercury used in the country is regulated -- which effectively means that about **99 per cent** of the mercury we use is completely unregulated.
- We have no information on how almost **90 per cent** of the mercury we import is used in this country.

This is suicidal, reiterates CSE. We cannot afford to become the global dumpyard for toxic mercury. We desperately need a tough phase-out policy that will ensure that regulations are enacted, import is banned, existing stocks inventoried and monitored strictly, recycling processes put in place and substitutes to mercury adopted.

### India is the destination

Exporting country	Mercury exported to India between 1997 and 2003
Spain	417 tonnes
UK	368 tonnes

Russia	267 tonnes
Italy	172 tonnes
USA	165 tonnes
France	403 tonnes
Germany	806 tonnes
Japan	362 tonnes
China	627 tonnes

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