

## **Arctic Council Mercury Project Steering Group**

### **Terms of Reference**

February 2012

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to set forth the rationale, mission and membership of the Arctic Council's Mercury Project Steering Group.

#### **Background**

Mercury has caused a variety of documented, significant adverse impacts to human health and the environment throughout the Arctic and the world. The metal and its compounds are highly toxic, especially to the developing nervous system of fetuses and young children. Human activities have significantly increased the amount of mercury that is available in the atmosphere; in soils and sediments; and in lakes, streams, and oceans.

Mercury pollution can be transported long distances, with impacts far beyond the immediate area where it is released into the environment. This is especially visible in the Arctic, which, in general, contains few anthropogenic sources of mercury but nonetheless, due to long range transport of emissions from outside the Arctic, experiences high mercury levels in the environment. Because of their traditional diet, some Arctic peoples receive high dietary exposure to mercury, raising concern for human health. Arctic wildlife also exhibit mercury levels that are above thresholds for biological effects, raising concern for the environment.

The Arctic Council, recognizing that mercury is a priority pollutant in the Arctic region, acting in accordance with the Arctic Council Rules of Procedure and the agreed Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP) guidance on project development, created the Mercury Steering Group in 2002. The stated overall objective of the group is "to contribute to a reduction of mercury releases from the Arctic countries, partly by contributing to the development of a common regional framework for an action plan or strategy for the reduction of mercury emissions, and partly by evaluating and selecting one or a few specific point sources for implementation of release reduction measures."

The Mercury Project Steering Group works with the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), which monitors mercury levels in the Arctic, as well as mercury releases from Arctic nations. The latest AMAP assessment, in 2011, shows increasing mercury levels in marine and freshwater Arctic biota. Reducing mercury releases to the environment is critical in reversing this trend of increasing mercury concentrations in Arctic biota, and the food supply of some indigenous peoples.

In addition to the Arctic Council efforts, the international community has focused efforts on reducing mercury pollution and its impacts on human health and the environment around the


world. Based on the 2002 UNEP *Global Mercury Assessment*, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) Governing Council initiated a Mercury Program in 2003. That Program features the Global Mercury Partnership, initiated in 2005, which engages countries and stakeholders to reduce mercury use and releases to the environment. The Partnership focuses on several areas important to understanding and reducing mercury pollution, including: artisanal and small-scale gold mining, mercury use in products and processes, mercury waste, mercury supply and storage, mercury emissions from various sources, including fossil fuel combustion, and environmental fate and transport of mercury.

In February 2009, the UNEP Governing Council agreed to begin negotiations on a legally-binding instrument for the global control of mercury pollution. Negotiations are now underway for an agreement that is anticipated to lead to the development of measures to reduce risks from exposure to mercury throughout the world. Negotiations are expected to conclude in 2013.

### **Mandate and Functions**

The primary mandate of the Mercury PSG is to coordinate and facilitate Arctic Council demonstration projects in Arctic nations that reduce the release of mercury into the environment, communicate results and coordinate synergies between projects.

The PSG is to:

- 
1. Continue to assist with implementation of approved Arctic Council (ACAP) mercury projects.
  2. Organize regular meetings, using teleconferencing or videoconferencing where appropriate, to discuss the development, funding, prioritization, implementation, and evaluation of projects fulfilling the primary mandate of the PSG.
  3. Coordinate with other international efforts to reduce mercury pollution, including the UNEP Global Mercury Partnership and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a global, legally-binding instrument on mercury.
  4. Coordinate with other entities in the Arctic Council, such as AMAP and the other PSGs in ACAP that work on issues related to mercury pollution in the Arctic.
  5. Develop, consider, and submit to ACAP for approval, as appropriate, projects for reducing mercury releases from sources in all ACAP countries.
  6. Share information of relevant domestic and bilateral activities of ACAP members and discuss their impact on PSG projects and objectives.

7. Encourage the participation of observers, investors, and other experts from non-ACAP countries.
8. Apply for funding, including Project Support Instrument funding, where applicable, to facilitate project implementation.
9. Provide status or progress reports about ACAP Mercury PSG projects in writing to the chair of ACAP prior to ACAP Working Group meetings, according to ACAP Operating Guidelines.
10. Incorporate the needs of local and indigenous populations in the design of project(s).
11. Adhere to the Arctic Council Rules of Procedure, ACAP Operating guidelines and ACAP Project Preparation Guidance document, as appropriate.
12. Propose modifications to these terms of reference, as needed, to ACAP for its consideration.

### **PSG Chairs**

The United States of America and the Russian Federation will be the first co-chairs of the PSG. The chairmanship of the PSG will rotate every two years. Starting in January, 2013, and every other year thereafter, the PSG will name a chair or co-chairs. If the PSG so chooses, the current chair or co-chairs may maintain the chairmanship for another term.

### **Membership**

Membership in the PSG is open to members of ACAP. The PSG can, in concurrence with the ACAP Working Group, decide to invite representatives of donors and parties who will actively contribute to the project.

### **Funding**

A number of countries and other possible participants have expressed interest in contributing resources for specific activities of the PSG. Additionally, funds may be available from the Project Support Instrument, once operational.

These Terms of Reference are not legally-binding and implementation of all activities are contingent upon the availability of funding which may be from Member States/Observers/Other PSG Participants, the Project Support Instrument, national development assistance, or other sources. Listing of activities in this document does not constitute or imply a promise of funding. Further it is recognized that not all activities may be eligible for all types of assistance indicated in this paragraph.