

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Minamata Convention on Mercury



Empowered lives. Resilient nations.

The Minamata Convention aims to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds. Supporting countries in their efforts to prepare for and meet their future commitments under the Minamata Convention is an important component of UNDP's efforts to achieve sustainable, inclusive and resilient human development through the SDGs, which were adopted in September 2015. Some of the key linkages between UNDP's work in support of the Minamata Convention's efforts to reduce the use/phase-out of mercury and the SDGs are highlighted below.



SDG Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

The urban and rural poor routinely face unacceptably high risks of exposure to mercury because of their occupations (e.g. mercury mining, artisanal and small-scale gold mining, waste management, recycling), living conditions (proximity to dumpsites and incinerators) and lack of knowledge of potential health impacts of exposure to mercury. At the same time, ecosystems that provide essential resources for the survival of the rural poor, are affected by mercury contamination. UNDP-supported interventions assist partners in introducing alternatives, best practices and techniques to minimize the use and release of mercury, and also address the underlying socio-economic challenges that are at the core of existing practices that use mercury.



SDG Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

One of the main sources for exposure to mercury is through consumption of mercury-contaminated fish and shellfish. The consumption of fish containing high levels of mercury, in particular those high on the food chain as mercury bioaccumulates, can have serious health consequences (see SDG 3). This causes health concerns, in particular for pregnant women, the child in utero and young children, as well as for poor communities relying on subsistence fishing. UNDP helps countries decrease the use of mercury and its release into the environment from various sectors, indirectly halting and reducing the build-up of mercury in the food chain.



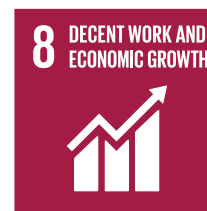
SDG Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Mercury is toxic to human health, posing a particular threat to the development of the child in utero and early in life. Human exposure occurs mainly by inhaling elemental mercury vapors during industrial processes and by consuming contaminated fish and shellfish, and can lead to mercury poisoning. Mercury exists in various forms: elemental; inorganic; and organic, which all have different toxic effects, including on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes. UNDP supports governments, the private sector and other partners, to reduce or preferably phase-out the use of mercury and mercury-containing products, and minimize its releases, to ultimately protect human and environmental health.



SDG Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Coal burning, and to a lesser extent the use of other fossil fuels to generate energy, is the second most significant anthropogenic source of mercury emissions into the atmosphere. Use of air pollution controls and more stringent regulations, combined with improved combustion efficiency, can offset most of the mercury releases associated with the increase in coal use, particularly in Asia and South America. However, reductions in current mercury releases will only be achieved after a shift to cleaner and more sustainable energy sources and the introduction of more efficient technologies and products (e.g. mercury-free energy-efficient lighting). UNDP supports countries in strengthening their regulatory frameworks, revising outdated industrial processes and technologies to reduce releases and increase efficiency and, most importantly, in adopting clean energy solutions.



SDG Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

Exposure to mercury can occur through the inhalation of mercury vapors. Such exposure is most likely to happen in the workplace. Among the most dangerous professions and livelihoods in terms of mercury exposure are artisanal and small-scale gold mining, waste handling and recycling, mercury refining, and health and dental care. Phasing-out the production and use of products and processes which use mercury is the main way to reduce worker exposure. We assist governments and various sectors introduce mercury-free products and processes, while also supporting the development of workplace safety standards and procedures, introducing personal protective measures, and addressing the underlying socio-economic causes that led to the use of mercury and products containing mercury.



SDG Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Sustainable consumption and production aims at "doing more with less," increasing net welfare gains from economic activities by reducing resource use, degradation and pollution, while increasing the quality of life. An important aspect of our work is the reduction of mercury pollution and mercury-containing wastes by introducing alternative products, processes and technologies that are mercury-free, cost-effective and in line with best available technology guidelines. Such interventions are aligned with those that increase resource efficiency, use clean and renewable energy, and reduce waste generation, all of which have important mercury reduction co-benefits.



SDG Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods, which are being threatened by marine pollution reaching alarming levels. Mercury levels in certain types of fish (e.g. bluefin tuna, swordfish) have become so high that some Governments advise against consumption or have introduced import bans. UNDP helps countries decrease the use and release of mercury from various land-based activities, prevent mercury from entering water sources, and reduce the build-up of mercury in the food chain.