

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Mercury is a naturally occurring element found in air, water, and soil. It is emitted from both natural and human-based activities.

What are the health impacts of using mercury in ASGM?

Mercury is considered by the World Health Organization as one of the top 10 chemicals of major public health concern. Exposure to mercury, even in small amounts, is associated with serious health problems. It spreads through the body and can affect the lungs, skin, kidneys, and brain. Effects include difficulty breathing, difficulty walking, blurred vision, tremors, infertility, and impotence. These effects may not be immediate and can be irreversible. Mercury is also very dangerous for pregnant women, affecting a child even before it is born.

How do people get exposed to mercury used in ASGM activities?

The final stage of gold recovery often uses mercury, which is very poisonous. Fumes from mercury are dangerous but invisible and odourless. You can be exposed from fumes when mercury is heated or handled, from touching it, from eating contaminated food, or when mercury in tailings is mixed with cyanide. Mercury vapour can remain in the air, deposit on clothes, travel to homes, and enter water where it ends up in fish.

Can people exposed to mercury be treated?

There is no cure for mercury poisoning. Once the neurologic consequences are manifested, they are irreversible. The person will need continuing treatment to manage the effects. The best way to treat mercury poisoning is to limit exposure to the metal.

Are there other countries with artisanal and small-scale gold miners?

Yes. ASGM activities take place in approximately 80 countries globally, spread across Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

I live far away from areas with mining activities. How does mercury use at the mines affect me?

Mercury emitted to the air doesn't just affect local communities. Mercury can be transported around the world in the atmosphere and can contaminate locations thousands of kilometres from its point of release. It can cycle between the atmosphere and the surface of land or swamps, rivers, lakes oceans for decades.

Are there alternatives to extract gold without mercury?

Yes. There are several technologies that either reduce or eliminate the use of mercury in artisanal gold mining. The appropriate technologies will depend on the ore type, available resources, and social and economic factors. There is no single technology appropriate to every ASGM situation, but successful approaches often include some combination of: improved crushing and milling; gravity concentration tools such as sluicing and shaking tables; flotation; and chemical leaching.

Is planetGOLD a gold certification system?

No, planetGOLD does not certify gold products.



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