



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

AUG 16 2004

Dear Senator Jeffords:

This is in response to your June 24 letter to President Bush on the issue of mercury pollution. The Administration recognizes the health risks associated with mercury that are mentioned in your letter as a serious concern both in the United States and globally.

At the 2003 meeting of the United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) Governing Council (GC), the United States proposed that UNEP establish a 'Mercury Program' to help less developed countries improve the scientific basis for mercury-related policy decisions, enhance risk communication to potentially-affected populations, and take action to reduce use and emissions of mercury. In advancing this proposal, the U.S. Government recognized that it serves our national interest when mercury emissions in other countries are reduced since such emissions contribute to mercury deposition in the United States and exposure of our citizens to mercury.

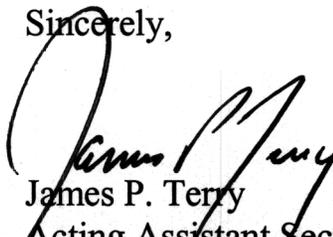
The United States has provided financial support as the largest donor to the UNEP Mercury Program, and the development of a global assessment of mercury. In addition, considerable U.S. expertise from several agencies was provided to assist UNEP in developing their global assessment report. The Department of State and EPA have supported activities in Asia and South America aimed at reducing mercury emissions and exposure. More recently, the United States has been working with the Brazilian government to organize a regional workshop to help countries in the Amazon basin to examine the extent of impacts and methods to address mercury releases from artisanal mining operations in this area. In our July 1, 2004 submission to UNEP, the United States provided information on this and other activities demonstrating our commitment to assisting other countries in addressing mercury pollution.

The Honorable
James M. Jeffords,
United States Senate.

In regards to your concern over engagement in an international dialogue on mercury, the United States proposed at the 2003 GC meeting that this issue remain on the agenda for the 2005 meeting. As a result, we will have an appropriate venue to continue our discussions on this issue with other countries. At this time, the Administration has no position with respect to your specific suggestion that a binding global agreement is the appropriate way to move forward on this issue, but we look forward to discussing this issue with other countries. The UNEP Mercury Program is making a valuable contribution in helping developing countries better understand the scope of emissions and exposure within their countries. The information developed by these activities will continue to improve our understanding of the global situation with respect to mercury pollution.

Thank you for your interest in this important subject. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance on this or any matter.

Sincerely,



James P. Terry
Acting Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs