
7 March 2022

Environmental agreement on mercury

The Minamata Convention on Mercury comes into effect today, as part of a global move to protect humans and the environment from the effects of the toxic heavy metal.

The global treaty was ratified by Australia on 7 December 2021 and takes effect across the nation.

Existing legislation and policies in South Australia already restrict mercury exposure from industrial activity, but the new restrictions and prohibitions on mercury or mercury compounds will be an important consideration for new proposals and developments.

In South Australia, changes at existing facilities like smelting and roasting of non-ferrous metals, waste incineration, cement clinker production and coal-fired industrial boilers will all now be considered in the context of meeting the convention commitments.

EPA Director Operations, Andrew Pruszinski, said that the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) would be working with businesses and planning authorities to explain how they might be affected.

“Planning authorities should understand which activities are restricted and prohibited in relation to new developments,” he said.

“We encourage all planning authorities to be aware that South Australia does have some of these industries.”

By ratifying the treaty Australia has supported global efforts, which reduces exposure risks for Australians.

Mercury persists in the environment once released and can travel large distances in oceans and the atmosphere, even in remote locations.

In people and animals, it can harm the immune system, brain, heart, kidneys and lungs, and the effects of exposure can occur at low levels.

The [Minamata Convention](#) addresses the life cycle of mercury from its entry into the environment in products or emissions from industrial processes, through to waste management and storage.

More information can be found online on the [EPA website](#).