

FIFTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE REPUBLIC )  
OF THE PHILIPPINES )  
First Regular Session )

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

10 JUL 21 P1:18

SENATE  
S. No. 1743

RECEIVED BY: *lv*

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Introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

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#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Constitution in Article 2, Section 13 provides that:

Section 13. The State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. It shall inculcate in the youth patriotism and nationalism, and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs.

Last February 2006, St. Andrew's School in Parañaque City faced closure following the complaint of parents of students exposed to mercury. A total of 19 students were confined at the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) while other parents said their children are beginning to develop rashes in different parts of the body. Some 35 students were exposed to mercury when a student accidentally opened a beaker containing mercury.

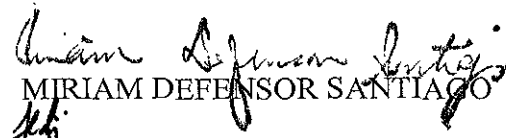
Mercury is a heavy, silvery d-block metal, and is one of six elements that are liquid at or near room temperature and pressure. Mercury and most of its compounds are extremely toxic and are generally handled with care; in cases of spills involving mercury (such as from certain thermometers or fluorescent light bulbs) specific cleaning procedures are used to avoid toxic exposure. It can be inhaled and absorbed through the skin and mucous membranes, so containers of mercury are securely sealed to avoid spills and evaporation.

The dangers of mercury spills cannot be overlooked. A study has shown that acute exposure (4-8 hours) to calculated elemental mercury levels of 1.1 to 44 mg/m<sup>3</sup> resulted in chest pain, dyspnea, cough, hemoptysis, impairment of pulmonary function, and evidence of interstitial pneumonitis.

Acute exposure to mercury vapor has been shown to result in profound central nervous system effects, including psychotic reactions characterized by delirium, hallucinations, and

suicidal tendency. Occupational exposure has resulted in broad-ranging functional disturbance, including erethism, irritability, excitability, excessive shyness, and insomnia. With continuing exposure, a fine tremor develops and may escalate to violent muscular spasms. Tremor initially involves the hands and later spreads to the eyelids, lips, and tongue. Long-term, low-level exposure has been associated with more subtle symptoms of erethism, including fatigue, irritability, loss of memory, vivid dreams, and depression.

This bill aims to prevent the accidental elemental mercury spills in schools to protect our school children from the adverse effects of mercury spills.<sup>1</sup>

  
MIRIAM DEFENSOR SANTIAGO  
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<sup>1</sup> This bill was originally filed during the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Regular Session

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1 AN ACT  
2 TO PROHIBIT THE USE, PURCHASE AND STORAGE OF ELEMENTAL  
3 MERCURY BY SCHOOLS

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:*

4 SECTION 1. *Short Title.* - This Act shall be known as the "Mercury Use in Schools  
5 Prohibition Act."

6 SECTION 2. *Declaration of Policy.* - The State recognizes the vital role of the youth in  
7 nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and  
8 social well-being. For this reason, it is declared the policy of the state to eliminate elemental  
9 mercury in schools to avert its deleterious effects on the health of school children.

10 SECTION 3. *Elimination of the Use of Elemental Mercury.* - Except as otherwise  
11 provided in this section, no public or private school or educational institution shall purchase, use  
12 or store any quantity of free flowing elemental mercury for any purpose, nor purchase, use or  
13 store any instrument which contains mercury including, but not limited to, thermometers,  
14 barometers, sphygmomanometers and manometers.

15 If no reasonably acceptable, mercury-free alternative exists for any instrument prohibited  
16 by subdivision one of this section, a school or educational institution may use such type of  
17 instrument which contains the lowest mercury content readily available on the market.

18 The Secretary of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Environment and Natural  
19 Resources, shall promulgate rules and regulations requiring public and private schools and  
20 educational institutions to dispose of or recycle any quantity of elemental mercury and  
21 instruments containing mercury in a manner which is least harmful to the environment.

1           SECTION 4. *Information Dissemination.* - The Secretary of Health shall compile,  
2 produce and distribute to all public and private schools and educational schools materials  
3 explaining the hazards created by elemental mercury and actions that may be taken to reduce  
4 such hazards.

5           SECTION 5. *Separability Clause.* - If any provision or part of this Act is held invalid, the  
6 remainder of this Act shall not be affected thereby.

7           SECTION 6. *Repealing Clause.* - All laws, decrees, executive order or rules and  
8 regulations inconsistent with this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

9           SECTION 7. *Effectivity Clause.* - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its  
10 publication in the Official Gazette or two (2) newspapers of general circulation.

11           Approved.

12