

U.N. seeks global pact to curb mercury

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Worldwide government leaders meeting in Bangkok have been asked to step up efforts to develop an international agreement curbing mercury.

Achim Steiner, executive director of the U.N. Environmental Program in Paris, urged governments to produce an agreement amid concern that increased burning of coal, naturally contaminated with mercury, is leading to the poisonous heavy metal's release into the air it, where can spread globally, the United Nations said in a news release.

Governments and other interested parties met in Bangkok to explore options from voluntary measures to legal treaties on how to reduce environmental sources of mercury.

The price of gold also may be increasing mercury pollution, UNEP said, since the heavy metal is used to extract gold from ore in mining operations.

While many countries have taken steps to eliminate mercury use, "a comprehensive and decisive response to the global challenge of mercury is not in place and this needs to be urgently addressed," Steiner said.

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