

# Mercury: Your Time Has Come

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## What is mercury?

Mercury is a toxic metal that poses serious health risks. It's still widely used in gold mining because it binds to gold, forming an amalgam that's easily separated from sediments. In this process, mercury ends up contaminating rivers, soil, and the atmosphere. When we inhale mercury or eat contaminated fish, the metal accumulates in our bodies, causing severe and irreversible damage.

## What is the Minamata Convention?

The Minamata Convention on Mercury is a global treaty, in force since 2017, designed to protect human health and the environment from mercury's harmful effects. It bans new mercury mines, mandates the closure of existing ones, and sets deadlines for phasing out mercury in various products and processes — such as light bulbs, batteries, thermometers, and more.

## Alternatives already exist

Effective methods to extract gold without mercury are already available. Shaking tables, sluice boxes, and gold pans — which use only water and gravity — have shown good results, and new technologies are advancing quickly.

## Toward elimination

Brazil has already phased out mercury in several products and industries. The next step is to end its use in mining as well. To make this transition to mercury-free mining, the country must:

## Smuggling in Brazil

Brazil does not produce mercury, and its use and import are strictly controlled. Despite this, the mercury used in wildcat mining is mostly illegal and smuggled in from neighboring countries. Estimates from Instituto Escolhas indicate that 185 tons of illegal mercury were used in gold mining in Brazil in just five years<sup>1</sup>.

## What does it say about mining?

The Minamata Convention does not yet explicitly ban the use of mercury in gold mining — something that must be reconsidered, given the metal's toxicity and the availability of safer alternatives. It does, however, condemn certain practices, such as open-air burning. The treaty also requires countries to develop plans to reduce or eliminate mercury use in mining. Brazil is behind schedule; the country should have presented its National Action Plan by 2020.

**Establish a deadline to eliminate mercury use in mining (as proposed by Bill 2417/2024);**

**Present and implement the National Action Plan required by the Minamata Convention;**

**Support the amendment of the Minamata Convention to establish a global deadline to phase out mercury use in mining.**

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1. To learn more, access *Where Does So Much Mercury Come From?* Available at: [https://escolhas.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EN\\_SUM\\_Mercury.pdf](https://escolhas.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/EN_SUM_Mercury.pdf).