



Project for
**Promoting
Minamata
Convention
on Mercury**



by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences

*Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences*

Proceeding report

Custom Online Training 1

**Custom Online Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury
Compounds**

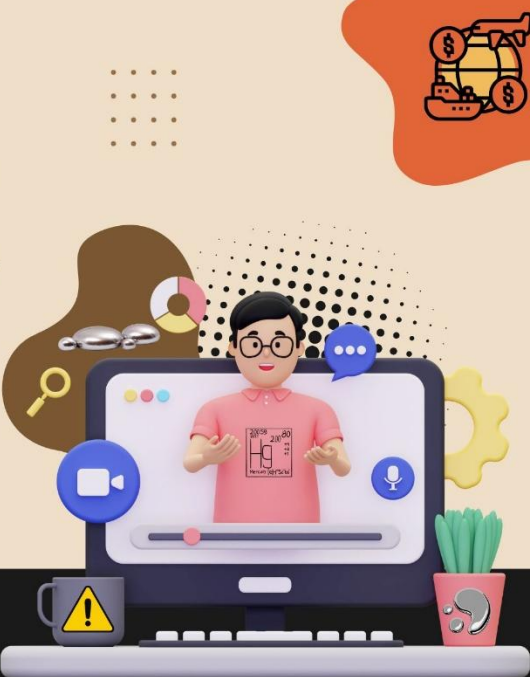
26 May 2025 (Online)



Custom Online Training #1

**CUSTOMS TRAINING TO
ENHANCE MONITORING
OF TRADE OF MERCURY
AND MERCURY
COMPOUNDS**

**MONDAY, 26 MAY 2025
15.30 -17:15 (UTC+7)**



Project for
**Promoting
Minamata
Convention
on Mercury**



by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences

Prepared by:

AIT RRC.AP

Table of Content

Background and Objectives	3
Participation Details.....	4
Opening Remarks	5
Housekeeping and Session Orientation	6
Presentation 1: Mercury Uses and Toxicity	7
Presentation 2: Global Mercury Trade	9
Presentation 3: Legal Obligations under the Minamata Convention.....	11
Open Q&A session	13
Closing Remarks.....	14
Participant Feedback	15
Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda	17

Background and Objectives

The **Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds**, held on **26 May 2025**, is part of a broader effort to build national capacity in support of the **Minamata Convention on Mercury**. The Convention is a key multilateral environmental agreement aimed at protecting human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

This training is organized under the **Japan-funded UNEP project** titled *“Project for Promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by Making the Most of Japan’s Knowledge and Experiences.”* The project seeks to strengthen implementation by facilitating **information exchange, awareness-raising, education, and technical capacity building** among participating countries.

Specifically, this session targeted **customs authorities, ministries of environment and health**, and other relevant stakeholders, with the goal of enhancing their understanding and practical ability to monitor and control mercury trade. By bringing together legal, technical, and enforcement perspectives, the training provided participants with an integrated view of the mercury trade landscape — covering:

- The global risks and sources of mercury pollution,
- Formal and informal trade flows of mercury and mercury-added products,
- Legal obligations under Article 3 of the Minamata Convention, and
- Practical challenges and tools available for national implementation and cross-border enforcement.

The training is the **first of a three-part online webinar series**, designed to complement in-person workshops and deepen stakeholder engagement across Asia and the Pacific.

Participation Details

A total of **140 participants** joined the *Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds* held on 26 May 2025. The participants represented a diverse mix of sectors and countries, aligning well with the training's goal of engaging both customs and environmental stakeholders.

Geographic Representation

The training drew participation from a wide range of countries, demonstrating broad regional interest and engagement on the topic of mercury trade monitoring. The top five countries by number of participants were: Philippines – 61 participants; Sri Lanka – 21 participants; Thailand – 16 participants; Nepal – 7 participants; & Cambodia – 6 participants.

These countries accounted for nearly 80% of the total participants. Other countries represented included Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam, among others, highlighting a strong subregional presence from South and Southeast Asia.

Institutional Background

Attendees represented a wide range of institutions:

- Government agencies – 45 participants
- Academia/Research institutions – 44
- Other sectors (including NGOs and private sector) – 47
- UN or International organizations – 4

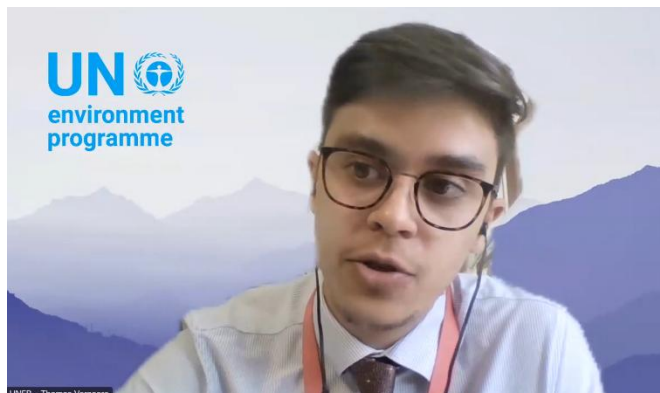
Gender Representation

The gender distribution among participants was as follows:

- Male – 90 participants
- Female – 48 participants
- Prefer not to say – 2 participants

Opening Remarks

The training session began with opening remarks from **Mr. Thomas Verbaere**, Programme Management Officer at the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**. He welcomed participants and emphasized the significance of the session as the first in a series of three custom trainings aimed at enhancing monitoring of mercury trade under the Minamata Convention. He underscored the persistent global challenges associated with mercury use, particularly in products and industrial processes, and emphasized the importance of building national capacity to prevent illegal or inappropriate mercury trade. He also highlighted that the training is part of a Japan-funded project led by UNEP to share practical knowledge and technical expertise drawn from Japan's long-standing experience in mercury management. Mr. Verbaere concluded by encouraging active participation and engagement from all attendees.



Mr. Thomas Verbaere, UNEP



Dr. Guilberto Borongan, AIT-RRCAP

This was followed by welcoming remarks from **Dr. Guilberto Borongan**, Director of the **Asian Institute of Technology – Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific (AIT RRC.AP)**. Dr. Borongan expressed his appreciation to UNEP, the Government of Japan, and all participants, particularly those representing customs and environmental agencies. He emphasized AIT RRC.AP's role in supporting countries in the region to implement multilateral environmental agreements, including the Minamata Convention. He reaffirmed the center's commitment to capacity building and knowledge-sharing, and highlighted the value of such training in helping countries fulfill their monitoring and enforcement obligations related to mercury trade. Dr. Borongan encouraged participants to actively learn from the sessions and apply the insights to their institutional roles.

Housekeeping and Session Orientation

The housekeeping and session orientation segment was delivered by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**, Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**, who also served as the session moderator.

Participants were welcomed once again and provided with key technical and engagement guidelines to ensure a smooth and interactive online experience. This included reminders about usage of chat boxes, Q&A features, recording of the meeting, and the resources to be circulated after the event.

The moderator also highlighted expectations for respectful and inclusive engagement throughout the training and encouraged participants to take full advantage of the opportunity to interact with expert speakers. A brief walkthrough of the day's agenda was shared to orient participants to the flow of the session, including thematic segments, speaker (short bio and their presentation topic), and Q&A sessions.

Light humor and informal interaction were used during this segment to create a relaxed and engaging atmosphere, helping participants feel at ease in the virtual environment.



Mr. Bishal Bhari (AIT-RRCAP) providing housekeeping rules and session orientation

Presentation 1: Mercury Uses and Toxicity

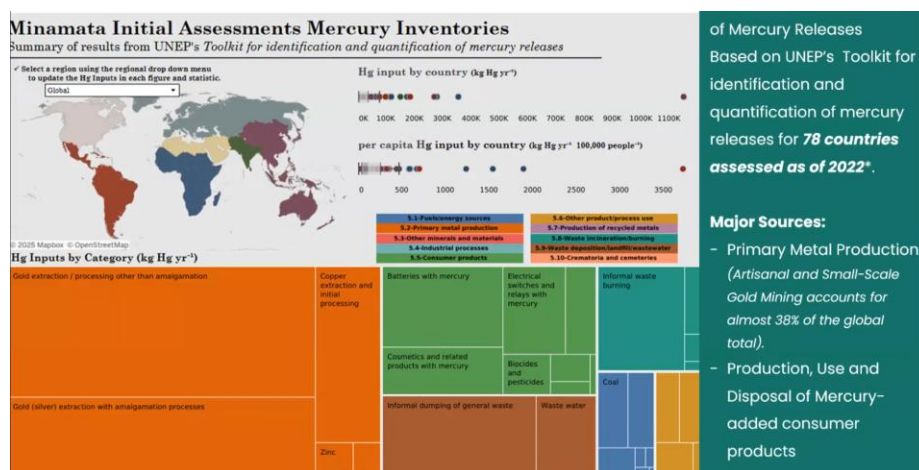
The first technical session was presented by **Ms. Tahlia Ali Shah** from the **Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)**. Her presentation provided an overview of mercury's forms, global sources of release, and its impact on human and ecological health.

She began by introducing mercury in its elemental, inorganic, and organic forms, emphasizing the unique toxicity of methylmercury due to its ability to bioaccumulate in food chains. Using data from UNEP's global assessments, she showed that artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is the largest single contributor to global mercury pollution. This trend is also reflected in the East Asia and Pacific region, where metal production and consumer waste are dominant sources.

The presentation further explored mercury-added products such as fluorescent lamps, thermometers, and cosmetics, highlighting how their improper disposal remains a long-term concern despite ongoing global phase-out efforts under the Minamata Convention.

Tahlia then shifted focus to the environmental and health impacts of mercury exposure. She explained how mercury transforms into methylmercury in aquatic environments and accumulates in fish, posing serious health risks to communities reliant on seafood. Special attention was given to biological hotspots such as wetlands and mangroves. She concluded with a review of health impacts, including Minamata disease, underscoring the developmental risks for children and unborn babies.

This session effectively framed mercury not just as a pollutant, but as a critical public health and environmental issue requiring integrated response across sectors.



Ms. Tahlia explaining the sources of Mercury in her presentation

Q&A Highlights

A question was raised by the Moderator in challenges in identifying and addressing mercury sources. In response, Tahlia emphasized the issue of limited awareness among both consumers and vulnerable communities, particularly in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) sector. She stressed the importance of stakeholder engagement and public education, especially for those using mercury as a livelihood tool, as well as the need for stronger inter-agency coordination and clear national regulations to manage mercury trade and usage effectively.

There was a question raised on how to identify mercury containing skin lightening product. She responded agreeing that mercury is often not listed on packaging despite being banned in many countries. She highlighted BRI's ongoing project aimed at identifying mercury in cosmetic products through randomized product sampling and laboratory analysis. The goal is to develop a global database to inform regulation and raise awareness among both consumers and regulatory bodies.

Presentation 2: Global Mercury Trade

The second session was delivered by **Ms. Anna Kobylecka**, Environment Programme Manager at the **World Customs Organization (WCO)**. Her presentation offered a comprehensive overview of the international trade landscape for mercury, including both formal trade flows and informal or illegal movements, with reference to the obligations of countries under the Minamata Convention.

She began by outlining key provisions of the Convention relevant to trade, including Article 3, which requires prior informed consent for mercury exports, and Article 4, which restricts trade in mercury-added products post phase-out dates. She also referenced Article 7, which requires Parties with artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) to take measures preventing the diversion of mercury into these activities.

Table 13. Global mercury consumption by geographic region

Regional mercury consumption (tonnes)	2005	2010	2015
East and Southeast Asia	1 600 - 1 900	1 697 - 2 638	1 931 - 2 882
South Asia	300 - 500	124 - 182	192 - 334
European Union	400 - 480	314 - 470	194 - 304
CIS and other European countries	150 - 230	115 - 189	113 - 230
Middle Eastern States	50 - 100	77 - 106	79 - 136
North Africa	30 - 50	22 - 29	29 - 52
Sub-Saharan Africa	50 - 120	216 - 506	234 - 660
North America	200 - 240	191 - 275	107 - 167
Central America and the Caribbean	40 - 80	54 - 88	51 - 104
South America	140 - 200	433 - 897	458 - 1 130
Australia, New Zealand and Oceania	20 - 40	15 - 20	16 - 27
Total	3 000 - 3 900	3 258 - 5 400	3 404 - 6 027

Source: UNEP's [Global Mercury Supply, Trade and Demand Report](#)

Ms. Anna gave insights into global mercury consumption during her presentation

Anna presented visual maps and datasets from UNEP and global trade databases illustrating the complexity and scale of mercury trade across regions. Notably, she discussed the persistence of trade corridors involving countries such as Tajikistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Nigeria, which play key roles as exporters or transit points. Trade maps from 2008 and 2015 (pages 5–6) and more recent interactive trade tools (page 7) showed how these routes have evolved over time.

The presentation emphasized the limitations of current global trade databases such as Comtrade, which often aggregate mercury compounds under broad codes, making it difficult to track individual substances accurately. Anna highlighted that over 9,500 mercury compounds are listed in public chemical databases, yet international tracking of these compounds remains weak due to naming inconsistencies and vague classifications.

She also addressed the illicit trade dimension, drawing on data from WCO's Illicit Trade Reports. Although the number of recorded seizures remains low, the volume seized increased significantly rising from 421 kg in 2022 to 1.23 tons in 2023. Nearly all recent seizures occurred in West Africa, with Burkina Faso accounting for 97% of reported seizures in 2023, linked to shipments transiting from Niger to Mali.

Anna concluded by noting that enforcement remains a challenge due to insufficient data granularity, limited customs training on chemical-specific risks, and lack of integration across regulatory agencies. She advocated for enhanced cooperation between customs authorities and environmental agencies, better use of trade intelligence tools, and stronger implementation of Convention provisions at the national level.

Q&A Highlights

During the Q&A session, participants raised several questions related to regional trade dynamics, data interpretation, and enforcement practices concerning mercury trade.

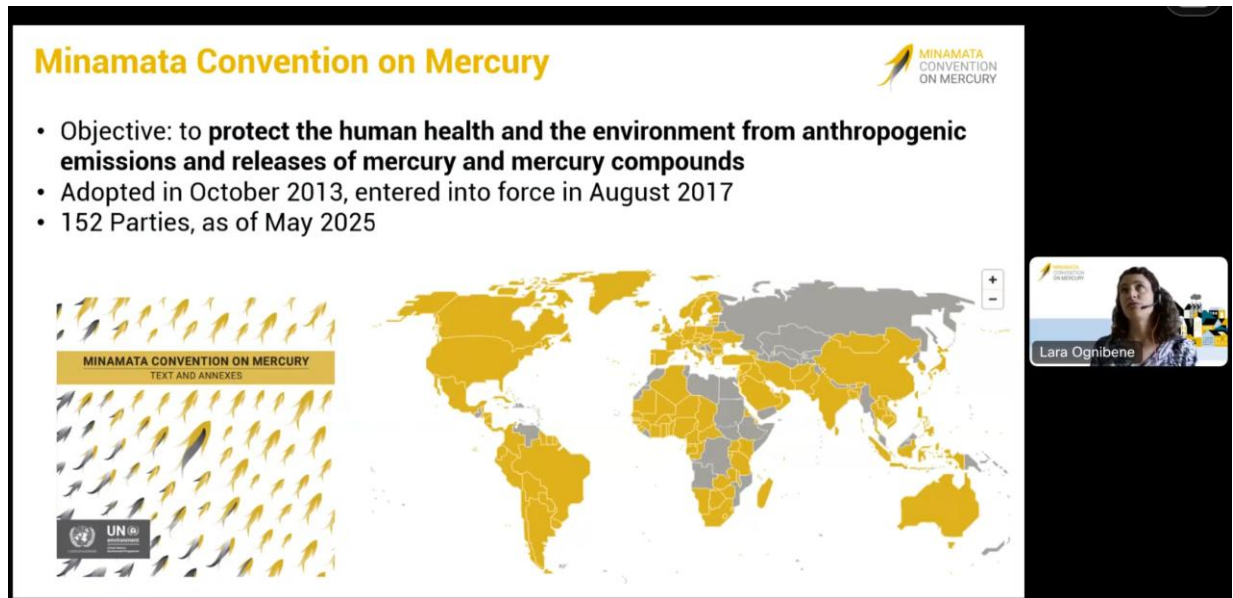
In response to a question about the high mercury consumption reported in East and Southeast Asia, Anna noted that countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand were key actors in the region's mercury trade landscape. She highlighted their involvement both in formal trade and artisanal gold mining activities, which remain significant sources of mercury demand and use.

Another participant sought clarification on the seemingly disproportionate increase in seizure volume despite a low number of reported cases in WCO's illicit trade data. Anna explained that while only two seizures were recorded in 2022 and four in 2023, the total quantity of mercury intercepted increased by 192%, reflecting a notable escalation in trade volume despite limited reporting.

The final question focused on practical advice for customs and environmental officers dealing with the identification of mercury compounds at border checkpoints. Anna acknowledged the challenge posed by the existence of over 9,500 mercury-related compounds, many of which are not clearly defined within standard trade codes. She advised officers to closely analyze national import/export records, make use of specific HS codes designated for mercury and its compounds, and supplement their procedures with granular customs classifications where available—such as those developed in the European Union. She emphasized the importance of tracing trade flows and verifying levels of compliance through both WCO frameworks and national regulatory tools.

Presentation 3: Legal Obligations under the Minamata Convention

The final technical session was delivered by Ms. Lara Ognibene, Legal Officer at the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Her presentation focused on the legal framework governing mercury trade under Article 3 of the Convention, which addresses both supply sources and international movement of mercury.



Ms. Lara providing details of Minamata Convention during her presentation

She began by restating the Convention's objective to protect human health and the environment from mercury emissions, noting that 152 Parties had ratified the treaty as of June 2025. Article 3 requires Parties to control mercury trade through measures such as obtaining written consent from importing countries and ensuring that the trade is either for allowed use or for environmentally sound storage. These requirements apply to trade between Parties, as well as transactions involving non-Parties, and are effective immediately upon a country's ratification.

To illustrate how the rules are applied, Lara presented three trade scenarios involving different combinations of Party and non-Party status. She explained the documentation needed in each case, including specific forms adopted by the Conference of the Parties, such as Form A for imports between Parties and Form C for certification by non-Parties. She also noted that countries like Canada, Japan, Thailand, and the United States have submitted general notifications of consent that simplify the process under defined conditions.

The presentation further highlighted Decision MC-5/2, which encourages Parties to build enforcement capacity, report implementation challenges, and contribute to the development of guidance. Reported challenges include illegal mercury transit, re-export, trade of unknown origin, and its continued use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining. Lara concluded by sharing examples of regional collaboration, such as a joint initiative among Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Togo to develop model regulations and strengthen control systems for mercury trade.

Q&A Highlights

In the Q&A following her presentation, Lara Ognibene addressed two key questions from the moderator and participants. First, she was asked about the practical challenges customs officers face in implementing and reporting under the Minamata Convention. She noted that one of the primary obstacles is the lack of coordination between customs authorities and national focal points, who are responsible for granting consent to mercury imports. This often results in confusion about the proper use and verification of required trade forms. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that customs officers are aware of the forms, understand the process, and verify that documentation is properly authorized. She also mentioned the difficulty in detecting mercury at border checkpoints due to its various forms and the lack of technical tools for on-site identification.

A participant then asked what happened to seized mercury involved in illegal trade — whether such shipments are repatriated to the country of origin. Lara clarified that the Minamata Convention does not contain any provision for the repatriation of seized mercury, unlike some other environmental treaties. She explained that in most countries, seized mercury is treated as hazardous waste and must be managed and disposed of in accordance with national waste legislation and Article 11 of the Convention, which governs mercury waste.

Open Q&A session

The Open Q&A session invited participants to engage with all three speakers in a concluding discussion. The moderator initiated the segment with a question directed to the panel: what recommendations they would offer to strengthen collaboration among customs, environmental agencies, and enforcement teams in line with the objectives of the Minamata Convention.

Ms. Tahlia Ali Shah responded by emphasizing the importance of first understanding the obligations under the Convention and conducting a legislative or gap analysis to assess how existing national regulations align with those requirements. She noted that countries need not reinvent systems but rather evaluate their current practices and seek to integrate the Convention's obligations into them. She pointed to the resources available through the Convention Secretariat, as well as guidance from institutions like the Biodiversity Research Institute, to support countries in adapting and implementing these measures effectively.

A follow-up question from a participant focused on whether mercury contamination could be confused with arsenic or if the symptoms in fisheries were less visible in mercury-related cases. This question referenced recent news from Northern Thailand where such concerns were raised. Tahlia responded by noting that while she could not speak specifically to arsenic, it is common for artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) to involve a range of hazardous chemicals beyond mercury, including cyanide. She explained that through national action plans supported by the Minamata Convention, countries are increasingly addressing these pollutants comprehensively. Measures designed to reduce mercury use often have co-benefits in tackling other toxic contaminants, thus advancing overall environmental health and safety.



Open Q&A Session

Closing Remarks

The training concluded with closing remarks delivered by **Mr. Thomas Verbaere**, Programme Management Officer at **UNEP**.

Mr. Verbaere thanked all participants for their time and engagement, expressing appreciation for the active involvement of customs officers and environmental authorities throughout the session. He also acknowledged the contributions of the expert speakers — Ms. Tahlia Ali Shah, Ms. Anna Kobylecka, and Ms. Lara Ognibene — for providing diverse and relevant perspectives on mercury risks, trade dynamics, and legal obligations under the Minamata Convention.

He reiterated UNEP's appreciation to the **Government of Japan** for funding the training series and expressed gratitude to **AIT RRC.AP** for facilitating the session. Mr. Verbaere emphasized that the training is part of a broader initiative and noted that **additional sessions are planned** to continue building capacity among national agencies involved in mercury monitoring and management.

He concluded by thanking all organizing partners and encouraging participants to remain engaged in the upcoming events.

Participant Feedback

There were **36 responses** to the feedback survey. The summary of the feedback is as follows:

Overall, how would you rate the quality of the training session?

Participant responses to overall satisfaction were mixed. Most respondents (58%) indicated they were Satisfied with the training, while 33% rated it Very Satisfied. However, 8% of respondents (3 participants) expressed that they were Very Dissatisfied, indicating a minority had a strongly negative experience.

How would you rate your level of preparation for the course?

Participant preparedness was mixed. While 31% rated their preparation as Very Good, and 17% as Excellent, the majority (39%) reported a Satisfactory level. Notably, 14% felt only Fairly prepared.

What was your level of skill/knowledge at the start of the course?

Initial self-assessments indicate that participants began the course with modest levels of knowledge. A combined 68% rated themselves as either Satisfactory (36%), Fair (33%), or Poor (8%). Only 22% considered themselves Very Good, and 8% Excellent.

What was your level of skill/knowledge at the end of the course?

Post-training assessments improved substantially. 47% rated their skills as Satisfactory, 36% as Very Good, and 11% as Excellent. Only 6% still felt their knowledge was Fair. These results demonstrate a positive shift in self-assessed capability, with most participants progressing from fair or satisfactory to higher levels of confidence and understanding.

Contribution of the course to your skill/knowledge

Most participants saw clear value from the course: 33% marked the contribution as Excellent, 31% as Very Good, and 33% as Satisfactory. Just 11% remained at Fair.

Likelihood of applying learning of the training in their work

Participants responded positively when asked if they would apply their new knowledge in practice: 56% indicated they were Likely, and 34% said Very Likely. However, 11% were Unsure.

Most valuable concept or takeaway

Participants most frequently cited insights into mercury trade regulation, the Minamata Convention, mercury-added products (especially cosmetics), and practical tools like HS coding and databases. These themes show that both the legal-regulatory framework and product identification were highly valued. Relevance to actual customs work—such as identifying illicit mercury flows—was appreciated, reinforcing that practical focus is essential.

Aspects needing improvement

Critical feedback revealed several recurring areas of improvement:

- Clarity on legal provisions and technical detection methods
- Real-life enforcement examples
- More time for discussion and interactive elements
- Pre-distribution of materials

Additional comments or suggestions

While many responded with “No” or “None,” useful suggestions included:

- Extending the training duration
- Including polls or interactive elements
- Adding short videos or real-world case clips
- Sharing slides beforehand

Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda

Online Custom Training #1

Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds

26th of May 2025

Concept Note and Programme Agenda

Background and Objectives

Minamata Convention on Mercury (the Convention) is one of the newest multilateral environmental agreements aiming at protecting human health and environment from anthropogenic emissions and release of mercury and mercury compounds. There has been a growing need for capacity building concerning appropriate mercury monitoring skills in developing countries to ensure the implementation of the required efforts to monitor the levels of mercury and mercury compounds.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is implementing a Japan-funded project called “Project for promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences” to support its member states for the implementation of the Convention. The project has a special focus on the area of information exchange, awareness and education, research, development, and monitoring. A comprehensive programme was designed to strengthen enabling capacity, build on the resources in and around Minamata, and employ technologies held by institutions in Japan for the effective implementation of the Convention’s obligations.

In addition to the in-person workshop planned, kindly note that national stakeholders will also be invited to participate in a series of online training sessions to be held tentatively from May to July 2025. These brief online webinars will provide key context to the issues related to mercury, global mercury trade and the obligations of the Minamata Convention on

Mercury. Attendees of all sessions will receive a Certificate of Participation.

Participation Details

Date: Wednesday 26th of May 2025

Venue: Virtual (Webex).

Registration: Please register for the webinar from the link or QR-code below:



<https://rrcap.webex.com/webappng/sites/rrcap/webinar/webinarSeries/register/6168a6a0b1bf436994389c98019c5e87>

Project title: Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences.

Webinar title: Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury, Mercury Compounds.

Participants: Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Health and Custom Authorities.

Language: English only (no interpretation provided)

Contact: japanmercuryproject@un.org; warm@rrcap.ait.ac.th

Project web: <https://www.unep.org/topics/chemicals-and-pollution-action/pollution-and-health/heavy-metals/mercury/promoting-minamata>

Programme Agenda

Time (UTC+7)		
15:30-15:33	Opening Remark Expected outcomes of the training series.	Thomas Verbaere, UNEP
15:33-15:36	Opening Remark	Guilberto Borongan AIT RRC.AP
15:36-15:40	Housekeeping Announcement + Speaker Introduction	Bishal Bhari (AIT RRCAP)
15:40-15:55	Issues related to mercury, its uses and toxicity to human health and the environment. Global overview of mercury hazards and risks.	Tahlia Ali Shah, Biodiversity Research Institute
15:55-16h00	Q&A	Moderator: Bishal Bhari (AIT RRCAP)
16:00-16:20	Global trade of mercury, mercury compounds and mercury added products. Overview of the main trends and route of formal and informal mercury trade globally and in the region.	Anna Kobylecka, World Custom Organization
16:20-16:25	Q&A	Moderator: Bishal Bhari (AIT RRCAP)
16:25- 16:30	Health Break	
16:30-16:50	Key obligations of the Minamata Convention on mercury trade management Presentation of the main provision on mercury trade under Article 3 of the Convention.	Lara Ognibene, Minamata Secretariat
16:50-17:00	Q&A (To all the speakers)	Moderator: Bishal Bhari (AIT RRCAP)
17:00-17:05	Closing Remark	Thomas Verbaere, UNEP



Project for
**Promoting
Minamata
Convention
on Mercury**



by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences

*Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences*

Proceeding report

Custom Online Training 2

**Custom Online Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury
Compounds**

29 June 2025 (Online)

UN environment programme bri RRC.AP
Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific

Custom Online Training #2

**CUSTOMS TRAINING TO
ENHANCE MONITORING
OF TRADE OF MERCURY
AND MERCURY
COMPOUNDS**

**TUESDAY, 29 JULY 2025
15.30 -17:15 (UTC+7)**

Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury UN environment programme MINAS
by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences

Prepared by:

Ashley Bastiansz, Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)

Table of Contents

Background and Objectives	3
Participation Details.....	4
Opening Remarks	5
Housekeeping and Session Orientation	6
Presentation 1: Mercury Uses and Toxicity	7
Presentation 2: Global Mercury Trade.....	9
Presentation 3: Legal Obligations under the Minamata Convention	11
Open Q&A session	13
Closing Remarks.....	14
Participant Feedback	15
Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda	17

Background and Objectives

The **Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds**, held on **29 June 2025**, is part of a broader effort to build national capacity in support of the **Minamata Convention on Mercury**. The Convention is a key multilateral environmental agreement aimed at protecting human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

This training is organized under the **Japan-funded United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) project** titled *“Project for Promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by Making the Most of Japan’s Knowledge and Experiences.”* The project seeks to strengthen implementation by facilitating **information exchange, awareness-raising, education, and technical capacity building** among participating countries.

Specifically, this session focused on **Best Practices/Available Resources for Managing Mercury Trade** and targeted **customs authorities, ministries of environment and health**, and other relevant stakeholders, with the goal of enhancing their understanding and practical ability to monitor and control mercury trade. By bringing together legal, technical, and enforcement perspectives, the training provided participants with an integrated view of the mercury trade landscape — covering:

- Managing Mercury Trade
- Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management
- Harmonized System (HS) Codes for Improved Mercury Trade Monitoring
- Controlling Mercury Trade

This training is the **second of a three-part online webinar series**, designed to complement in-person workshops and deepen stakeholder engagement across Asia and the Pacific.

Participation Details

A total of **62 participants** joined the *Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds* held on 29 June 2025. The participants represented a diverse mix of sectors and countries, aligning well with the training's goal of engaging both customs and environmental stakeholders.

Geographic Representation

The training drew participation from a wide range of countries, demonstrating broad regional interest and engagement on the topic of mercury trade monitoring. The top five countries by number of participants *based on registration* were: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. Other countries represented included Maldives, India, Nepal, Gabon, Ghana, Cameroon among others, highlighting a strong subregional presence from South and Southeast Asia, and Africa.

Institutional Background

Attendees represented a wide range of institutions, *list descending*:

- Government agencies
- Academia/Research institutions
- Other sectors (including NGOs and private sector)
- UN or International organizations

Gender Representation

The gender distribution among participants *based on registration* was as follows:

- Male – 37 participants
- Female – 51 participants
- Prefer not to say

Opening Remarks

The training session began with opening remarks from **Mr. Thomas Verbaere**, Programme Management Officer at the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**. He opened the session by welcoming participants and highlighting the importance of the continuation of this training—the second in a three-part series designed to strengthen the monitoring of mercury trade under the Minamata Convention. He drew attention to the ongoing global challenges posed by mercury use, while the obligations of the Minamata Convention are in place to assist countries with the controlling mercury worldwide, mercury trade still remains a large challenge. A challenge that requires technical capacity, inter-agency collaboration, data exchange and international cooperation, which is what these trainings aims to foster. He further emphasized his gratitude in the continued engagement participants from ministries of environment and health, Customs and law enforcement agencies, and experts supporting these efforts. Mr. Verbaere concluded by wishing all participants a productive webinar.



This was followed by warm welcoming remarks from **Dr. Guilberto Borongan**, Director of the **Asian Institute of Technology – Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific (AIT RRC.AP)**. Dr. Borongan expressed his appreciation to all participants to the second webinar in this training series. He recognized the Japan funded project, promoting the Minamata Convention by making use of Japan's knowledge, under which this project is made possible as well as collaborators UNEP and BRI, and experts from the World Customs Organization (WCO) for their expertise. He provided a brief overview of the Asian Institute of Technology Regional Resource Centre for Asia and Pacific's (AIT RRC.AP) role in supporting countries in the region to implement multilateral environmental agreements, including the Minamata Convention. He reaffirmed the center's commitment to capacity building and knowledge-sharing, and highlighted the value of such training in helping countries fulfill their monitoring and enforcement obligations related to mercury trade under the Minamata



Convention. Dr. Borongan concluded by wishing participants an engaging and fruitful learning experience.

Housekeeping and Session Orientation

The housekeeping and session orientation segment was delivered by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**,

Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**, who also served as the session moderator.

Participants were welcomed once again and given essential technical and engagement guidelines to help ensure a smooth, interactive online experience. These included reminders on how to use the chat and Q&A features, information about the recording of the session, and details on resources that would be shared following the event.

Mr. Bhari emphasized the importance of a respectful and inclusive engagement throughout the second training and encouraged participants to actively engage with the expert speakers. A brief overview of the day's agenda was then provided, outlining the thematic segments, introducing the speakers with short bios and presentation topics, and highlighting the planned Q&A sessions. To foster a relaxed and welcoming virtual environment, the moderator used light humor and informal interaction, helping participants feel more at ease and engaged from the outset.



Mr. Bishal Bhari (AIT-RRCAP) providing housekeeping rules and session orientation

Presentation 1: Overview of Available Resources to Support Managing Mercury Trade

The first technical session was presented by **Ms. Ashley Bastiansz** from the **Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)**. Her presentation provided an **Overview of Available Resources to Support Managing Mercury Trade**.

She began by introducing the importance of managing mercury trade due to ongoing issues; (1) persistence of illicit mercury trade; (2) smuggling of mercury through concealed or mislabeled shipments; (3) need for multi-agency response; (4) harmful impacts of illicit mercury trade; and (5) necessity of international and national collaboration. She then provided an overview of the Minamata Convention by highlighting the provisions of Article 3 and the guidance forms available for participants on the Convention's website.

Ms. Bastiansz segued into the discussing the key stakeholders (e.g., Customs agencies, Environmental and Health Authorities, and Law Enforcement), their respective roles in controlling mercury trade, and the importance of cross collaboration across agencies. She then highlighted the need for capacity building and training, and communication and collaboration in developing implementation strategies for cross collaboration. Following this, she provided an overview of the need for and key elements of standard operating procedures (SOPs) as a strategic adaptable reference tool for planning and inspection.

Ms. Bastiansz then shifted focus to available resources in controlling mercury trade by presenting on documents and resources that can be found through various agencies websites:

- WCO: Standard Operating Procedures for controls of waste shipments (2024), Illicit Trade Report (2023), Trade Tools platform – Harmonized System General Rules for interpretation
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA): Inventory of Mercury Supply, Use, and Trade in the United States 2023 Report
- Basel Convention: Guidelines for Waste Management
- Global Mercury Partnership (GMP): Website for technical assistance and identification of partners

She concluded by emphasizing the importance of using these aforementioned, among others, to assist with controlling mercury trade and meeting the obligations of the Minamata Convention.

This session effectively framed mercury trade as an issue that requires inter-agency cooperation, international and national collaboration, and available technical resources.

Q&A Highlights

A question was raised by a participant who asked what the most underused resource was. In response, Ms. Bastiansz emphasized that all of the resources are important to use, however she felt that the GMP website is an important resource as it houses a lot of information that people can keep up to date on in this field, as well as resources and identifying partners that can assist with specific issues related to mercury trade.

Presentation 2: Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management

The second session was delivered by **Ms. Chalani Rubesinghe**, National Consultant - Mercury and Health Project at the World Health Organization country office in Sri Lanka. Her presentation offered a comprehensive overview of legislative and institutional strengthening needs for improving management and trade of mercury, using mercury-added skin-lightening products as a case study.

Firstly, she provided an overview of existing legislations (e.g., Minamata Convention, Border Control measures, Prior informed consent (PIC)) which she learned more about during the National Customs Training Workshop organized under this Japan-funded project in collaboration with the GEF 10810 project on *Eliminating mercury skin lightening products* that took place on 2 June 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Ms. Rubesinghe presented on the identified gaps in mercury trade management including loopholes in existing regulations, implementation gaps, lack of awareness among border control personnel and inter-agency coordination, deficiency in facilities at border control points, and corruption and systemic lapses.

She posted the question in the chat on the which of these gaps poses the greatest challenge in your context. Many participants answered poor facilities and testing at borders, which Ms. Rubesinghe also agreed Sri Lanka faces as well.

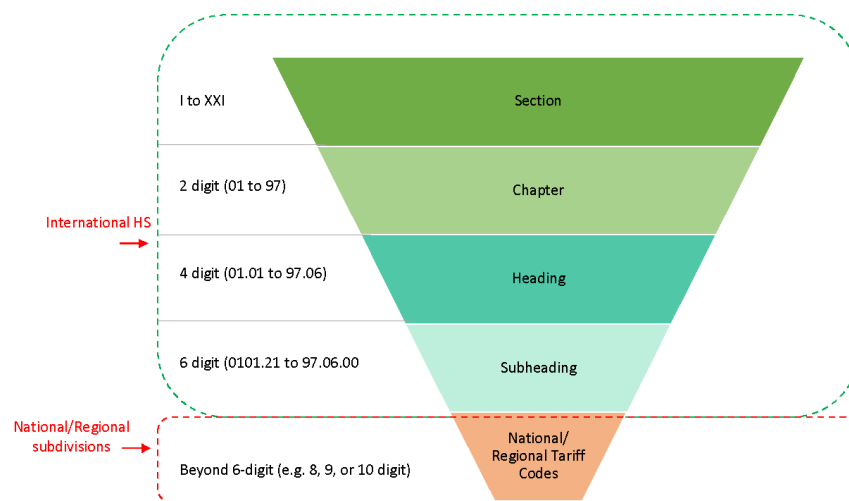
If you're a Customs officer and an unclear shipment of cosmetics arrives at the border, what challenges would you face in verifying the compliance, if compliance exists. For example, in Sri Lanka cosmetics cannot exceed 1ppm of mercury. Participants mentioned no database or testing facilities.

Ms. Rubesinghe shifted to Best Practices which included strengthening national regulations, improving inter-agency collaboration, promoting and facilitation mercury-free alternatives, strengthening testing and surveillance capacity, developing robust databases and inventory systems, and monitoring and managing mercury waste. She continued further by emphasizing enhancing regional collaboration, addressing informal trade routes and border leakages, regional harmonization of laws and penalties, and engagement of NGOs and civil society in strengthening mercury trade management.

She concluded with adding the Basel Action Network as another resource to add to Ms. Bastiansz's previous presentation.

Presentation 3: HS Codes for Improved Trade Monitoring of Mercury-added Products

The third technical session was delivered by Dr. Kyaw Nyunt Maung, UNEP, focused on the use of Harmonized System (HS) codes for improving illegal mercury trade. His presentation started off by highlighting the need to meet Article 4 and 21 of the Minamata Convention through increased understanding of imports/exports of mercury-added products (MAPs) and the national use of HS codes and sub-codes. Dr. Maung briefly explained the development and maintenance of 6-digit HS codes by the WCO and noted that over 200 countries nationally using these codes. He discussed that sub-codes of more than 6-digits can be created by national and regional authorities, however most sub-codes do not segregate MAPs.



Mr. Maung providing details of HS codes and sub-codes.

Dr. Maung then followed by presenting present HS codes for products that may be used for MAPs. He then segued in the Minamata Initial Assessments (MIAs) of various countries and the MAPs identified in the respective countries as well as the HS codes used for reference. He provided an example of different HS codes used for similar products, pointing out that tariff codes used vary by countries. Using Uruguay as an example, Dr. Maung explained that the Minamata focal point – the Environment Directorate (DINAMA) – recognized the need for better information on MAPs and resultantly convened a Working Group consisting of the Ministry of Public Health, the Technological Laboratory of Uruguay and the National Directorate of Customs. This Working Group created new 10-digit HS codes for clinical thermometers and blood pressure measuring devices, which allows for national

governments and regional entities to better identify these products containing mercury. Dr. Maung then concluded his presentation by calling to attention proposed customs codes of more than 6-digits for participants to review, as stakeholders are not always aware of this process.

This presentation showcased the importance of creating more specific HS codes at the national level to better regulate MAPs, strengthening information collection of trade, and ultimately assisting with meeting the obligations of the Minamata Convention, more specifically Article 4.

Presentation 4: Principles of Controlling Mercury Trade

The final technical session was delivered by Ms. Anna Kobylecka of the World Customs Organization (WCO), who presented on the principles of controlling mercury trade, in line with the Minamata Convention, specifically through the lens of Customs, to protect human and environmental health.

Ms. Kobylecka began her presentation with outlining Article 3 of the Minamata Convention that discusses the import/export of mercury trade, the need for Customs to ensure compliance with trade provisions as illegal trade may involve (1) misdeclaration; (2) transporting mercury without or falsified documentation; (3) disguising controlled goods within a shipment of uncontrolled commodities or hiding mercury among other goods; and (4) smuggling including “ant trafficking” techniques. She continued with Article 4 of the Minamata Convention and underscored that Customs need to ensure compliance issues resulting from (1) continued illegal trade and sale of MAPs; (2) availability of mercury-added skin-lightening products both online and in store; and (3) mislabeling or misdeclaration of products covered by restriction or prohibitions to evade Customs’ detection. Following this, Ms. Kobylecka, provided an overview of Article 11 of the Convention focusing on measures related to mercury waste. In regard to Article 11, Customs needs to take the appropriate measures to ensure that residual mercury is not smuggled, dumped or polluting the environment, and emphasized the key challenge associated with mercury waste.

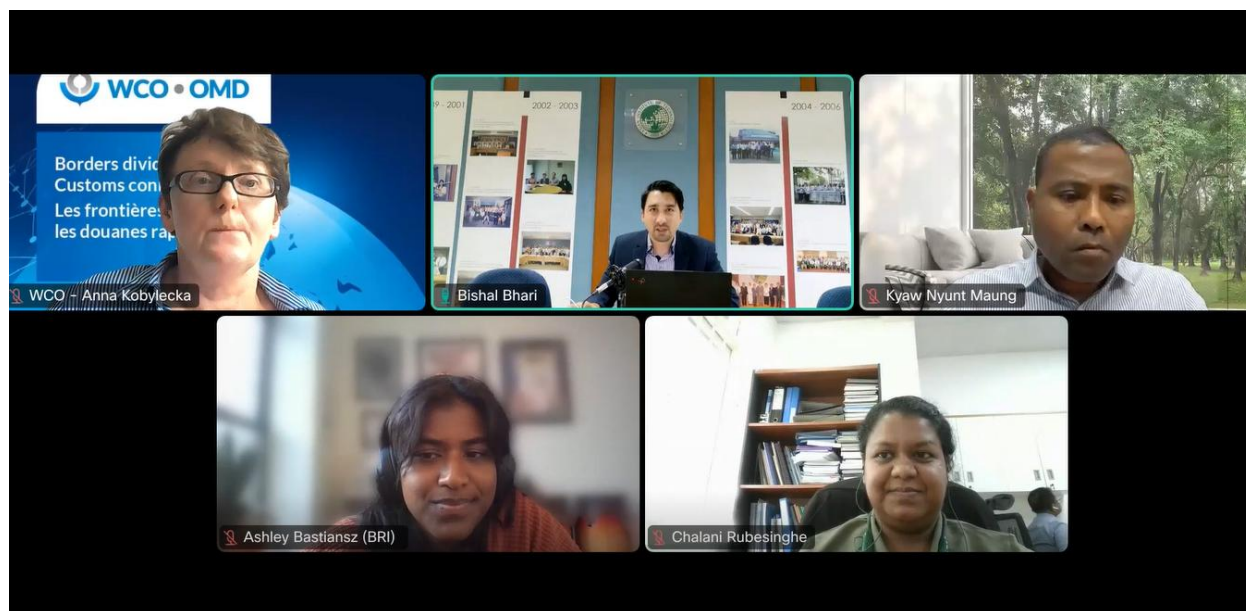
Ms. Kobylecka then transition into mercury demand and trade dynamic where she pointed out that Customs agencies need to be aware of mercury demand fueled by presence of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), and gold prices, as mercury supply typically moves in the opposite direction of gold flow but travels along the same smuggling routes used for other contraband. In continuation, she provided an overview of safety measures and cooperation in controlling mercury trade by underlining Customs need for proper protective equipment (PPE) when inspecting mercury shipments, collaboration with environmental agencies for guidance on safe handling and disposal, and lastly information sharing to improve safety enforcement and protocols. For stronger enforcement implications to combat illegal trade under the Convention and national laws, Customs must implement strict border verification measures, coordination with environmental, police authorities among others to dismantle criminal networks, use risk profiling and seizure data to track illicit trade routes, and promote regional intelligence sharing and joint border enforcement actions.

In conclusion, Ms. Kobylecka stressed that controlling mercury trade requires Customs agencies must be proactive, informed on legal frameworks, specificity of the trade, and most importantly collaborative in order to meet the obligations of the Minamata Convention.

Open Q&A session

The Open Q&A session invited participants to engage with all three speakers in a concluding discussion moderated by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**, Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**. The moderator initiated the segment with a question directed to Mr. Maung and Ms. Rubesinghe – what are the main challenges with switching from 6- to 8- or 10-digit codes? Mr. Maung responded that this type of information has not been widely disseminated to Parties, countries, or relevant stakeholders, making the process of distinguishing MAPs from other types of products unfamiliar to many. At the national level, establishing effective systems or processes requires strong coordination. As highlighted in Chalani’s presentation, coordination is often weak. Strengthening collaboration among agencies is essential, particularly in ensuring that decision-makers are both aware of this process and able to access reliable information at the national level.

Mr. Bhari then opened the feedback survey and initiated a final question for Ms. Kobylecka by asking her what are the common tactics of illegal trade? Ms. Kobylecka responded by explaining that, in principle, different types of mercury-containing commodities that require specific documentation and compliance with the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure among others. However, common issues at the border include the use of incorrect HS codes, false declarations of value, mislabeling, and smuggling in small quantities.



Open Q&A Session

Closing Remarks

The training concluded with closing remarks delivered by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**, Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**.

Mr. Bhari urged participants to complete the Customs Training Feedback Survey as well as to utilize the knowledge from this training and apply it to national legislation and Customs policies. He expressed hope for stronger inter-agency collaboration and capacity building, and for participants to use this workshop to train others. He mentioned that all of the presentations and additional training materials will be shared after this workshop.

To conclude, Mr. Bhari encouraged participants to attend the third and last online Customs training webinar taking place on 13 August 2025.

Participant Feedback

Post-Training Survey

Total Respondents: 10

- Gender: Male – 6, Female – 4

Countries Represented:

- Sri Lanka – 3
- Nepal – 2
- Myanmar – 1
- Philippines – 1
- Gabon – 1
- Listed as “test” or unspecified – 2

Organization Types:

- Academic/Research Institutes – 3
- NGO or Civil Society – 2
- Ministry of Environment – 2
- Customs Authority – 2
- Private Sector – 1

Overall Satisfaction

- Very Satisfied: 5 respondents
- Satisfied: 5 respondents

Self-Assessed Knowledge & Skills

Level of Skill/Knowledge at Start of Course:

- Excellent: 3 respondents
- Fair: 3 respondents
- Satisfactory: 4 respondents

Level of Skill/Knowledge at End of Course:

- Excellent: 3 respondents
- Very Good: 4 respondents
- Satisfactory: 3 respondents

Contribution of Course to Skill/Knowledge:

- Excellent: 3 respondents
- Very Good: 3 respondents
- Satisfactory: 4 respondents

Participants experienced clear improvement in knowledge from start to end. The training was especially effective for those who began with lower skill levels. All participants recognized some value added by the training.

How likely are you to apply the knowledge and techniques learned during this training to your current work?

- Very Likely: 6 respondents
- Likely: 4 respondents

Most Valuable Concepts or Takeaways

- Regulatory Strengthening: Importance of closing legal loopholes in national regulations.
- Customs Knowledge: Insights on HS codes and their relevance.
- Mercury Trade Awareness: Understanding the overall trade landscape and associated loopholes.
- Monitoring & Compliance Tools: Knowledge of legal frameworks, support mechanisms, and tools for tracking mercury trade.
- Enforcement Techniques: Emphasis on monitoring, code tracking, and case-based learning.

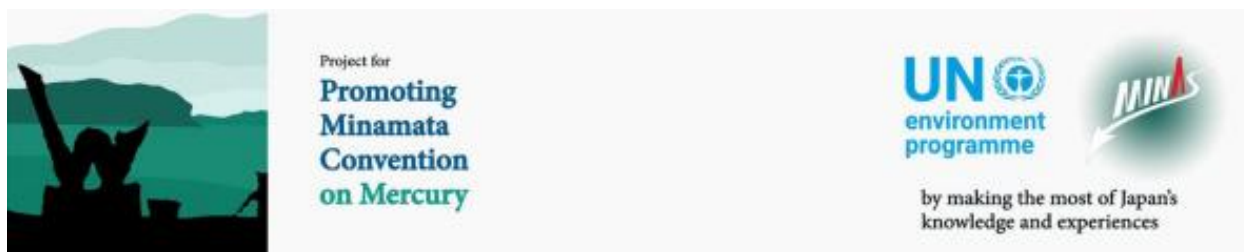
Unclear or Insufficient Aspects

- Most responses left blank or marked “No”, indicating few perceived gaps.
- One participant emphasized the need for more detailed examples and deeper focus on:
 - Identifying source countries
 - Common misdeclarations
 - Use of real-world seizure cases for practical insights

Key Insights

Participants found the training informative and relevant, especially around legal frameworks and trade monitoring. A few noted the need for more in-depth, practical content, such as case studies to strengthen real-world application.

Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda



Online Custom Training #2

Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds

29th of July 2025

Concept Note and Programme Agenda

Background and Objectives

Minamata Convention on Mercury (the Convention) is one of the newest multilateral environmental agreements aiming at protecting human health and environment from anthropogenic emissions and release of mercury and mercury compounds. There has been a growing need for capacity building concerning appropriate mercury monitoring skills in developing countries to ensure the implementation of the required efforts to monitor the levels of mercury and mercury compounds.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is implementing a Japan-funded project called “Project for promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan’s knowledge and experiences¹” to support its member states for the implementation of the Convention. The project has a special focus on the area of information exchange, awareness and education, research, development, and monitoring. A comprehensive programme was designed to strengthen enabling capacity, build on the resources in and around Minamata, and employ technologies held by institutions in Japan for the effective implementation of the Convention’s obligations.

In addition to the in-person workshop planned, kindly note that national stakeholders will also be invited to participate in a series of online training sessions to be held tentatively from May to August 2025. These brief online webinars will provide key context to the issues related to mercury, global mercury trade and the obligations of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Attendees of all sessions will receive a Certificate of Participation.

Participation Details

Date	Tuesday 29 th of July 2025
Time	15:30 – 17:15 (UTC+7)
Registration	Please register for the webinar from the link or QR-code below:
	 <i>Click Here to Register</i>
Venue	Virtual (Webex); Meeting Link will be sent to registered participants.
Project title	Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences.
Webinar title	Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury, Mercury Compounds
Participants	Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Health and Custom Authorities.
Language	English only (no interpretation provided)
Contact	japanmercuryproject@un.org ; warm@rrcap.ait.ac.th
Project web	<i>Click Here</i>

Programme Agenda

Online Custom Training #2 will focus on exploring the best practices and available resources for managing mercury trade. Detail agenda is as follows:

15:30-15:36	Opening Remark	Thomas Verbaere, UNEP Guilberto Borongan, AIT RRC.AP
15:36-15:40	Housekeeping Announcement	Bishal Bhari (AIT RRCAP)
15:40-16:00	Overview of Available Resources to Support Managing Mercury Trade.	Ashley Bastiansz, Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)
16:00-16:20	Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management.	Chalani Rubesinghe, World Health Organization (WHO) Sri Lanka Office
16:20-16:40	Harmonized System (HS) Codes for Improved Mercury Trade Monitoring	Kyaw Maung, UNEP
16:40-17:00	Principles of Controlling Mercury Trade	Anna Kobylecka, World Customs Organization (WCO)
17:00-17:15	Q&A	Facilitated By: Ashley Bastiansz (BRI)



Project for
**Promoting
Minamata
Convention
on Mercury**



by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences

*Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences*

Proceeding report

Custom Online Training 3

**Custom Online Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury
Compounds**

13 August 2025 (Online)

UN environment programme bri RRC.AP
Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific

Custom Online Training #3

**CUSTOMS TRAINING TO
ENHANCE MONITORING
OF TRADE OF MERCURY
AND MERCURY
COMPOUNDS**

WEDNESDAY, 13 AUGUST
15.30 -17:15 (UTC+7)

Project for
Promoting
Minamata
Convention
on Mercury

UN environment programme
by making the most of Japan's
knowledge and experiences

Prepared by:

Ashley Bastiansz, Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)

Table of Contents

Background and Objectives	3
Participation Details.....	4
Opening Remarks	5
Housekeeping and Session Orientation	6
Presentation 1: Mercury Uses and Toxicity	7
Presentation 2: Global Mercury Trade.....	9
Presentation 3: Legal Obligations under the Minamata Convention	11
Open Q&A session	13
Closing Remarks.....	14
Participant Feedback	15
Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda	17

Background and Objectives

The **Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds**, held on **13 August 2025**, is part of a broader effort to build national capacity in support of the **Minamata Convention on Mercury**. The Convention is a key multilateral environmental agreement aimed at protecting human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

This training is organized under the **Japan-funded United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) project** titled *“Project for Promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by Making the Most of Japan’s Knowledge and Experiences.”* The project seeks to strengthen implementation by facilitating **information exchange, awareness-raising, education, and technical capacity building** among participating countries.

Specifically, this session focused on **Best Practices/Available Resources for Managing Mercury Trade** and targeted **customs authorities, ministries of environment and health**, and other relevant stakeholders, with the goal of enhancing their understanding and practical ability to monitor and control mercury trade. By bringing together legal, technical, and enforcement perspectives, the training provided participants with an integrated view of the mercury trade landscape — covering:

- Managing Mercury Trade
- Legislative and Institutional Strengthening Needs for Improved Mercury Trade Management
- Harmonized System (HS) Codes for Improved Mercury Trade Monitoring
- Controlling Mercury Trade

This training is the **third (final) of a three-part online webinar series**, designed to complement in-person workshops and deepen stakeholder engagement across Asia and the Pacific.

Participation Details

A total of **41 participants** joined the *Online Custom Training on Monitoring the Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds* held on 13 August 2025. The participants represented a diverse mix of sectors and countries, aligning well with the training's goal of engaging both customs and environmental stakeholders.

Geographic Representation

The training drew participation from a wide range of countries, demonstrating broad regional interest and engagement on the topic of mercury trade monitoring. The top five countries by number of participants *based on registration* were Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines, highlighting a strong subregional presence from South and Southeast Asia, and Africa.

Institutional Background

Attendees represented a wide range of institutions, *list descending*:

- Government agencies
- Academia/Research institutions
- Other sectors (including NGOs and private sector)
- UN or International organizations

Gender Representation

The gender distribution among participants *based on registration* was as follows:

- Male – 36 participants
- Female – 46 participants
- Prefer not to say

Opening Remarks

The training session began with opening remarks from **Mr. Thomas Verbaere**, Programme Management Officer at the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**. He opened the session by welcoming participants to the third and final session of the webinar on behalf of UNEP. He highlighted the lessons learned over the previous two online sessions and the exploration of the global supply and demand of mercury, informal trade, and the implications on human and environmental health. He also touched the importance of participants' engagement, cross sectoral dialogue, and the importance of cross- and inter-agency collaboration, which are vital in helping Parties meeting the obligations of the Minamata Convention. He encouraged participants to actively contribute during this final webinar and share experiences from their own context that can be carried forward beyond this series.



Dr. Guilberto Borongan, AIT-RRCAP

This was followed by warm welcoming remarks from **Dr. Guilberto Borongan**, Director of the **Asian Institute of Technology – Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific (AIT RRC.AP)**.

Dr. Guilberto warmly welcomed everyone to the final session of the

“Custom Online Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds.” He extended sincere thanks on behalf of UNEP and its partners to all participants for their involvement. He emphasized the broader global effort to strengthen oversight of mercury trade and explained that today’s webinar would focus on key lessons learned, customs operations, HS codes, interagency coordination, legal enforcement, and strategies to address challenges in mercury trade. Dr. Guilberto highlighted critical areas where enforcement systems currently fall short and expressed his delight in having such a dedicated group present, wishing everyone a productive and engaging learning experience.

Housekeeping and Session Orientation

The housekeeping and session orientation segment was delivered by **Mr. Bishal Bhari**, Programme Officer at **AIT RRC.AP**, who also served as the session moderator.

Participants were welcomed and given essential technical and engagement guidelines to help ensure a smooth, interactive online experience. These included reminders on how to use the chat and Q&A features, information about the recording of the session, and details on resources that would be shared following the event.

Mr. Bhari emphasized the importance of a respectful and inclusive engagement throughout the second training and encouraged participants to actively engage with the expert speakers. A brief overview of the day's agenda was then provided, outlining the thematic segments, introducing the speakers with short bios and presentation topics, and highlighting the planned Q&A sessions. To foster a relaxed and welcoming virtual environment, the moderator used light humor and informal interaction, helping participants feel more at ease and engaged from the outset.



Mr. Bishal Bhari (AIT-RRCAP) providing housekeeping rules and session orientation

Presentation 1: Overview of National Training Activities conducted in Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Palau

The first session was presented by **Ms. Ashley Bastiansz** from the **Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI)**. Her presentation provided an **Overview of National Training Activities conducted in Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Palau**.

She started off by providing a high-level summary of the Japan-funded project aimed at promoting the implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury regionally implemented by UNEP and co-executed by AIT and BRI. This initiative leveraged Japan's knowledge and experience to support participating countries in strengthening their capacity to manage mercury trade and enforce Convention obligations. The workshops provided a comprehensive program that included technical training, practical exercises, and policy discussions, with a strong focus on enhancing interagency coordination. In-person National Trainings were held in Sri Lanka (2 June 2025), Palau (17 June 2025), and Mongolia (23–24 June 2025), bringing together key national stakeholders to advance mercury control efforts at the national level.

Ms. Bastiansz mentioned that across all three in-person National Trainings, presentations were delivered on the following items:

- **Scientific & Policy Context:** Review of Human Health Impacts of Mercury, Minamata Convention Obligations on Mercury Trade and Mercury Mass Flow Analysis
- **Institutional Roles & Coordination:** Role of Customs in Minamata Convention implementation and Overview of available tools and resources
- **National Institutional Capacity:** Exploring cross-agency collaboration among Customs, environmental agencies, and law enforcement
- **Practical & Technical Training:** Customs inspection procedures and profiling including case studies on smuggling and interception, mercury detection and forensic analysis techniques
- **Strategic Planning:** Developing National Action Plans and SOPs for enforcement and regulatory agencies

She then presented a more detailed table showing the different categories that were presented as well as the differences and similarities in their trainings.

Category	Sri Lanka	Mongolia	Palau
Country-Specific Focus	Mercury mass flow in Sri Lanka	Mercury mass flow in Mongolia	Mercury mass flow in Palau
Experiences with other national projects	UNDP POPs project	ASGM experience (PlanetGOLD); Indonesia case study	Mercury-added product phase-out
Mercury Products in Trade	Focus on mercury-added skin lightening products (SLPs)	No specific product type emphasized	Focus on identifying mercury-added products (MAPs) (broader scope)
Human Health Focus	Health impacts discussed focused on use of SLPs	General health impacts + XRF risk-assessment	Emphasis on biomonitoring (hair sampling) and Pacific regional context
Waste Management	Disposal capacity discussed (gaps highlighted)	Dedicated session on mercury waste handling and disposal	Overview of national handling, storage, disposal systems
Customs Capacity	Practical exercises in shipment profiling and smuggling tactics	Similar customs training + simulated joint operation planning	Training on hazardous substance identification, confiscation, and export
Enforcement Simulation	Practical inspection exercises	Group activity: plan and simulate joint enforcement operation	Exercise: Developing national action plans for mercury phase-out
Cross-Agency Collaboration	General emphasis on stakeholder cooperation	Detailed protocols: joint ops, info-sharing, enforcement SOPs	Highlighted SOPs session
Regional/International Case Studies	Other countries dealing with mercury-added SLPs	Indonesia's experience shared	Regional context in Pacific Islands highlighted in discussion

She discussed that countries had the same overall training experience and presentations; however, certain materials were tailored to the specific needs of each country: (1) Sri Lanka –focus of mercury-added SLPs; (2) Mongolia – focus on ASGM; and (3) Palau – identifying MAPs. It was highlighted that all three countries shared a similar issue with mercury waste management – only Mongolia has a storage facility however they are not permitted to add new mercury waste, additionally all three countries shared the same limitations with Customs’ capacity

Ms. Bastiansz then segued into the key takeaways from each of the countries National Trainings. Helped deepen understanding of mercury-related issues especially related to mercury-added SLPs. She started with Sri Lanka, where participants clearly recognized the importance of monitoring mercury trade, and that this training reinforced their role in the Minamata Convention. She also highlighted that the participants in Sri Lanka expressed the strong need for ongoing collaboration with national stakeholders to stay informed on mercury issues. Lastly, participants from Sri Lanka pointed out that institutional capacity for enforcement must be enhanced through training and partnerships.

In Mongolia, participants gained a deeper understanding of the Minamata Convention, with strong emphasis on regulatory compliance, interagency coordination, and mercury management. There was particular interest in mercury monitoring, storage, and disposal—especially in the context of ASGM. Discussions on international instruments were highly relevant, and participants expressed a clear desire for further training, long-term capacity building, and exploring the development of a dedicated mercury storage facility.

In Palau, Customs officials found the workshop valuable for understanding mercury trade challenges and improving monitoring efforts. Both Customs and the Environmental Quality Protection Board (EQPB) raised concerns about limited storage space for prohibited items and inadequate disposal infrastructure. Participants highlighted broader constraints, including lack of funding for hazardous material management and absence of lab equipment to test MAPs at entry points. Additionally, Customs faces difficulties returning prohibited goods, as exporters often deny ownership or claim items are counterfeit.

Ms. Bastiansz concluded her presentation with a short Q&A discussion.

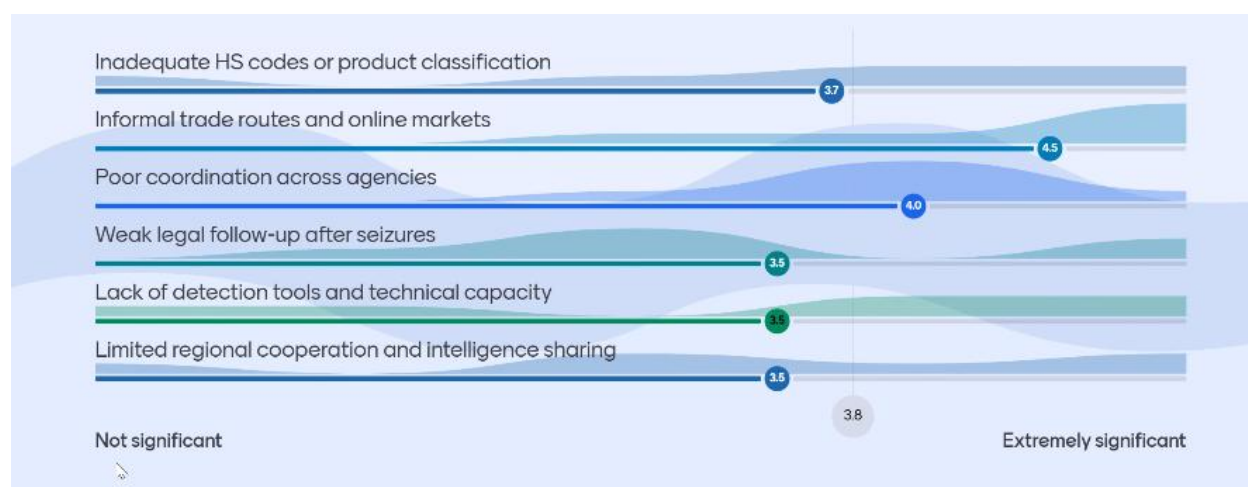
Panel Discussion

Following Ms. Bastiansz's presentation, a panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Bishal Bhari (AIT) with panelists Ms. Anna Kobleckya (WCO), Ms. Chalani Rubesinghe (WHO Sri Lanka Office), Dr. Guilberto Borongan (AIT), and Mr. Kyaw Nyunt Maung (UNEP) to discuss prominent questions from the previous trainings.



Mr. Bhari started the panel discussion with a mentimeter exercise by asking participants “what is the biggest barrier to effective mercury trade enforcement in your country?” Participants used the application to respond and mentioned collaboration, procedure, evidentiary issues, lack of expertise, low priority, specialized training, and regulation as barriers to effective mercury trade enforcement.

The second question Mr. Bhari asked participants on mentimeter was “How significant are the following challenges to mercury trade enforcement in your country?” Participants responded the following:



Leading into the panel discussion, Mr. Bhari highlighted some of the key challenges previously highlighted in both the in-person and online trainings which included difficulty in detection, fragmented inter-agency collaboration, legal framework enforcement, lack of capacity and co-operation, lack of specific HS codes, weak inter-agency effort, weak follow-through on seizures, and informal trade.

Panel discussion Q&A with experts

Question 1 – Addressed to Mr. Kyaw Nyunt Maung (UNEP)



Mr. Maung pointed out that a key challenge raised—both in the sub-regional workshop and at the national level—is the limitation of the 6-digit HS code system in identifying mercury-added products. He emphasized that to enhance tracking, countries (e.g., those in ASEAN and Uruguay) have developed national-level codes beyond 6 digits. However, this requires strong interagency collaboration, which is currently limited in some countries. A proposal at COP4 outlined three possible approaches to extending HS codes, but national-level action—particularly by Customs agencies—may be faster and more effective in the short term.

Question 2 – Addressed to Ms. Anna Kobleckya (WCO) and Ms. Chalani Rubesinghe (WHO)



Ms. Kobleckya started off the discussion by reinforcing that Customs agencies require a clear legal framework and mandate to effectively identify and act on banned or prohibited products. This includes the authority to conduct surveillance, particularly in the context of online trade, and access to data on the scale and nature of illegal imports. To take targeted action, Ms. Kobleckya articulated that Customs must have (1) A defined role and legal basis to respond to prohibited goods; (2) Clear product identifiers (e.g., names, categories) to aid detection; (3) Collaboration with online platforms to address digital trade channels; and (4) A risk management approach informed by reliable data on illicit trade. She concluded by stressing that without this foundation, enforcement efforts remain limited and reactive.

Ms. Rubesinghe followed Ms. Kobleckya by drawing attention to Sri Lanka and the present voluntary measures used to promote safer products online. However, Ms. Rubesinghe underscored that stronger enforcement models exist—Amazon, for example, requires cosmetics sellers to comply with safety standards, including mercury restrictions. She then mentioned the local regulatory oversight that involves National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) registration and licensing through Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) for cosmetics, and the fact that Customs playing a key enforcement role, but they are reliant on data-sharing from other agencies. She then discussed the need to formally identify mercury and related loopholes as restricted substances as the Sri Lanka Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) conducts market testing and holds regulatory authority, but consumer focus tends to be on product results rather than safety compliance. Ms. Rubesinghe concluded by placing importance on stronger interagency coordination and clear mandates, which are essential for effective regulation, especially in the growing online trade of SLPs.

Question 3 – Addressed to Ms. Anna Kobleckya (WCO) and Ms. Chalani Rubesinghe (WHO)

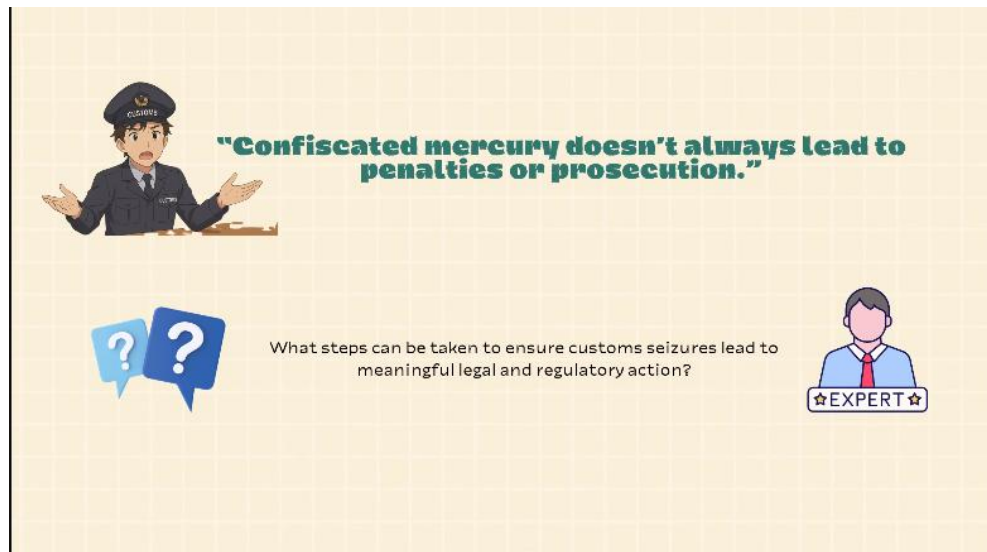


Ms. Rubesinghe started off the discussion for the third question by affirming that effective regulation of hazardous products, including mercury-containing items, relies on strong interagency collaboration—particularly between health, environment, and customs authorities. She pointed out key points elements including the critical importance of joint enforcement because when health or environmental risks are identified, agencies must coordinate with Customs to ensure bans are enforced. Another key element pointed out was the shared database or platform which can reduce duplication—for example, if Customs already has a flagged product list, re-testing can be avoided, reducing both time and economic burden. She also highlighted the importance of Customs officers’ participation in interagency meetings to better understand the public health and environmental rationale behind restrictions. Lastly, she reinforced the frequently raised point surrounding the need for testing facilities at border points, along with the importance of SLSI compliance, as well as collaboration with academic institutions that have the necessary laboratory infrastructure which can improve efficiency and fill capacity gaps. She made it clear that building integrated systems and sharing responsibilities across sectors will strengthen national enforcement and improve regulatory outcomes.

Ms. Kobleckya finished the discussion of this question by reemphasizing that controlling the trade of mercury is a shared responsibility that requires coordinated action across multiple agencies. Customs authorities play a critical frontline role, acting as the first line of defense against the illegal movement of mercury and mercury-added products. However, for collaboration to be effective, it must be backed by clear legislation that provides each agency with the legal mandate to act. She stated that at the national level, roles must be clearly defined—particularly regarding responsibilities for storage, testing, and prosecution.

While the WCO does not currently provide mercury-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs), its existing guidance on hazardous waste can be adapted for this purpose. At the regional level, WCO can support enforcement through its Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices, which Customs agencies are already familiar with. To conclude, Ms. Kobylecka made it clear that establishing strong legal and operational frameworks both nationally and regionally is essential to ensure effective control of mercury trade.

Question 4 – Addressed to Ms. Anna Kobylecka (WCO)



Ms. Kobylecka outlined three key stages in regulatory case development: detection, seizure/handling, and evidence management. A crucial need is to identify high-risk commodities, especially those not clearly listed as restricted products. Customs should develop detailed risk profiles in collaboration with other relevant authorities to guide their approach. Customs officers must be trained on how to handle these commodities safely, including the proper use of PPE, and know when to engage with competent authorities. When a seizure occurs, clear protocols are needed on whether Customs should transfer the items to environmental or other agencies, and what information must be documented to maintain the chain of custody for prosecution. Ms. Kobylecka concluded by emphasizing that, national procedures should ultimately be established through cooperation between Customs and competent authorities to ensure effective management and enforcement throughout the entire process.

Question 5 – Dr. Guilberto Borongan (AIT)



Dr. Guilberto emphasized the importance of active regional enforcement collaboration, referencing initiatives like the Bali Declaration, ASEAN working group, and the Sri Lanka workshop. He urged countries to join forces to combat transnational smuggling and share intelligence, while holding authorities accountable through regular tracking of progress via trainings and enforcement update platforms. Promoting healthy competition can motivate proper action. Dr. Guilberto also highlighted the need for more regional workshops offering onsite training and called for investment in improved laboratory facilities with specialized mercury testing capabilities. Recognizing that many countries face similar challenges, he suggested regional lab sharing to maximize resources and support enforcement across borders.

A participant in the chat wrote that in Sri Lanka, there is currently insufficient legal framework to regulate mercury-containing products, such as whitening creams, due to the absence of a specific cosmetics law. Ms. Rubesinghe address this comment by confirming that indeed no dedicated agency oversees this issue, with only the CAA having limited authority. While the CAA can remove such products from the market and pursue legal action, these actions are restricted to specific regions and do not extend nationwide.

Closing Remarks

The training concluded with closing remarks delivered by **Mr. Thomas Verbaere**, Programme Management Officer at the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**. As the webinar and project comes to a close, Mr. Verbaere thanked the panelists and participants for their active involvement. He emphasized the shared commitment of government authorities and technical experts to combat mercury trade. The efforts made so far serve not as an endpoint but as a strong foundation to guide future policy and actions. UNEP remains dedicated to supporting ongoing capacity building and fostering dialogue. He expressed sincere gratitude to all for their contributions toward protecting human health and the environment.

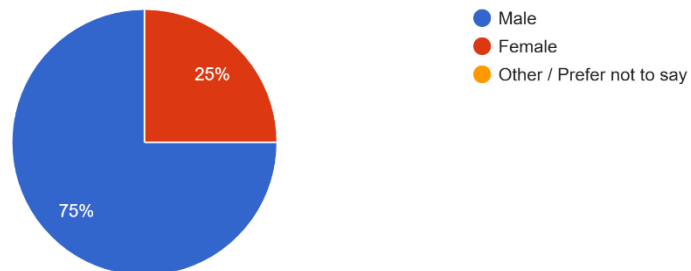
Participant Feedback

Post-Training Survey

Section 1: Participant Information

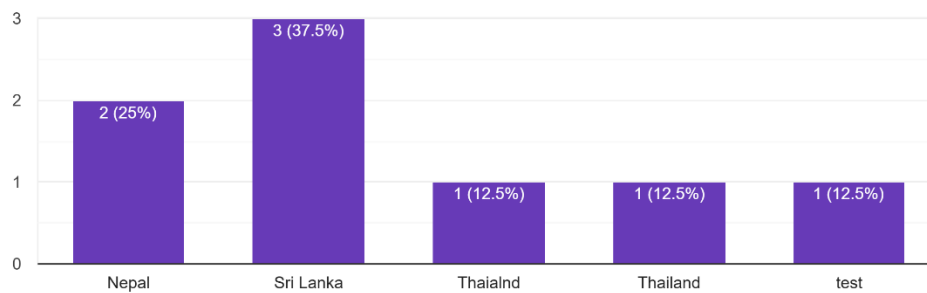
1. Gender

8 responses



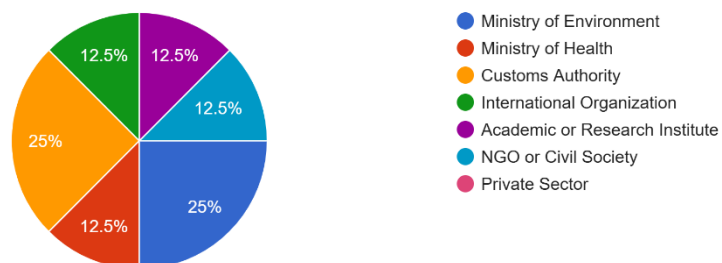
2. Country

8 responses



3. Organization Type (Please select one)

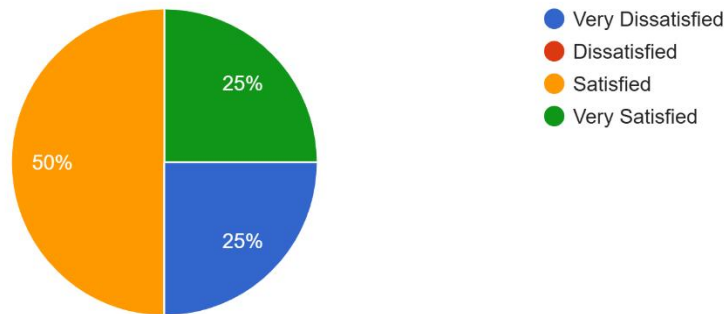
8 responses



Section 2: Course Satisfaction and Content Evaluation

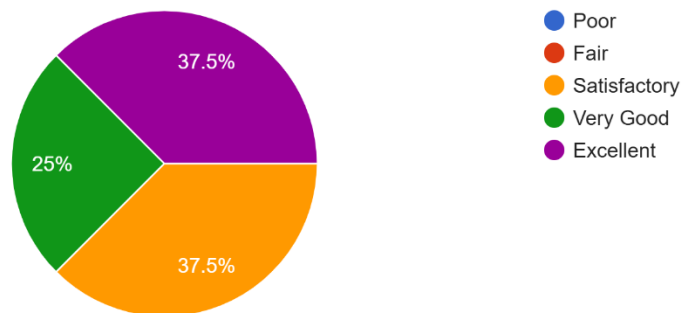
4. Overall, how satisfied are you with this training session?

8 responses



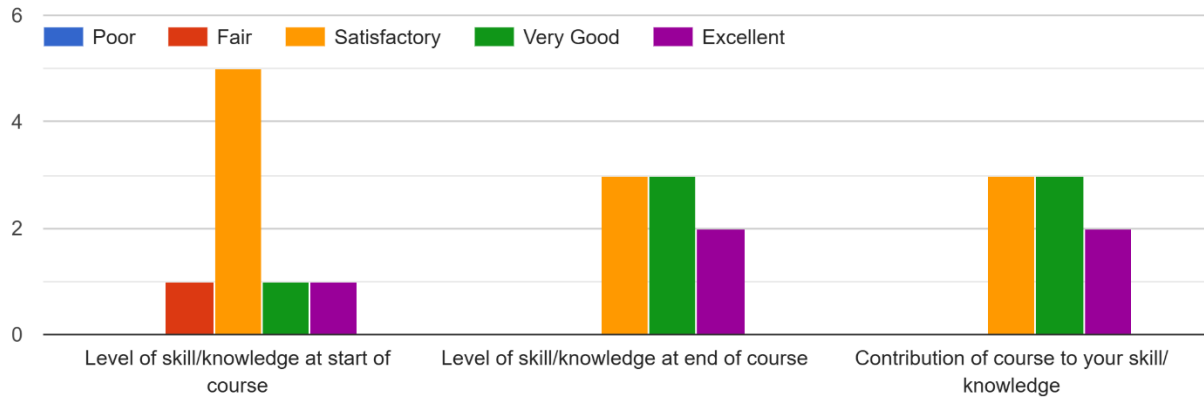
5. How would you rate your level of preparation for the course?

8 responses



Section 3: Knowledge Acquisition and Contribution to Learning

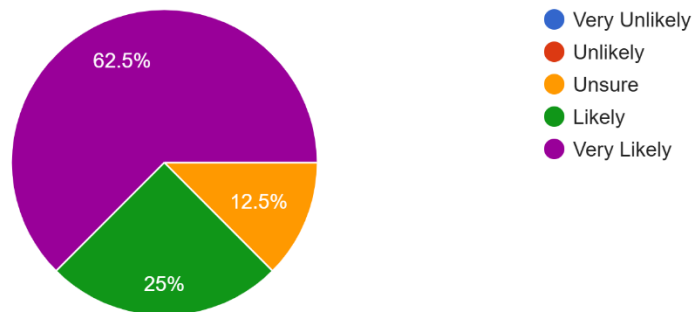
6. Skill and Knowledge Assessment (Mark one option per row)



Section 4: Application and Relevance

7. How likely are you to apply the knowledge and techniques learned during this training to your current work?

8 responses



Section 5: Additional Feedback

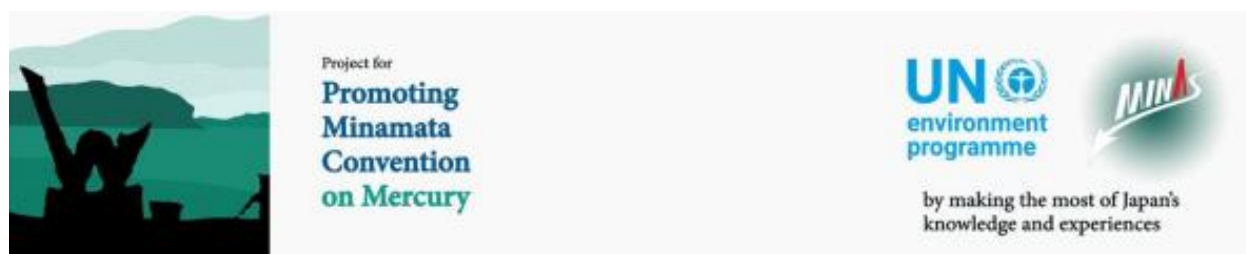
Most valuable takeaways from the training included:

- Strategies to reduce mercury use in society
- Awareness of illegal mercury trade
- Importance of passing on a mercury-free society to future generations
- Benefits of using national-level HS Classification for statistical purposes

Additional comments or suggestions for improving future training courses:

- Please arrange the training in a physical form as much as possible.
- Training with action plans for each country and with targets with timelines.

Annex 1: Concept Note and Program Agenda



Online Custom Training #3

Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury and Mercury Compounds

13th of August 2025

Concept Note and Program Agenda

Background and Objectives

Minamata Convention on Mercury (the Convention) is one of the newest multilateral environmental agreements aiming at protecting human health and environment from anthropogenic emissions and release of mercury and mercury compounds. There has been a growing need for capacity building concerning appropriate mercury monitoring skills in developing countries to ensure the implementation of the required efforts to monitor the levels of mercury and mercury compounds.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is implementing a Japan-funded project called “Project for promoting the Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences¹” to support its member states for the implementation of the Convention. The project has a special focus on the area of information exchange, awareness and education, research, development, and monitoring. A comprehensive programme was designed to strengthen enabling capacity, build on the resources in and around Minamata, and employ technologies held by institutions in Japan for the effective implementation of the Convention's obligations.

In addition to the in-person workshop planned, kindly note that national stakeholders will also be invited to participate in a series of online training sessions to be held tentatively from May to August

2025. These brief online webinars will provide key context to the issues related to mercury, global mercury trade and the obligations of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Attendees of all sessions will receive a Certificate of Participation.

Participation Details

Date	Thursday 13 th of August 2025
Time	15:30 – 17:15 (UTC+7)
Registration	Please register for the webinar from the link or QR-code below:



[Click Here to Register](#)

Venue	Virtual (Webex); Meeting Link will be sent to the previously registered participant.
Project title	Project for Promoting Minamata Convention on Mercury by making the most of Japan's knowledge and experiences.
Webinar title	Customs Training to Enhance Monitoring of Trade of Mercury, Mercury Compounds
Participants	Ministries of Environment, Ministries of Health and Custom Authorities.
Language	English only (no interpretation provided)
Contact	japanmercuryproject@un.org ; warm@rrcap.ait.ac.th
Project web	Click Here

Programme Agenda

Online Custom Training #3 will focus on Lessons Learnt in Trainings on Managing Mercury Trade. Detail agenda is as follows:

15:30-15:35	Opening Remarks	Thomas Verbaere, UNEP Guilberto Borongan, AIT RRC.AP
15:35-15:40	Housekeeping Announcement	Bishal Bhari, AIT RRCAP
15:40-16:10	Overview of National Training Activities conducted in Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Palau Sri Lanka, Mongolia, & Palau - key takeaways in managing mercury and mercury-added products	Ashley Bastiansz, BRI
16:10 – 16:15	Health Break	
16:15-17:00	Panel Discussion: Tracking the Unseen: Improving Detection, Coordination, and Action Against Mercury Trade	Panel: Anna Ewa Kobylecka, World Custom Organization (WCO) Guilberto Borongan, Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Chalani Rubesinghe, World Health Organization – Sri Lanka (WHO) Kyaw Nyunt Maung, United Nation Environmental Program (UNEP) Moderator: Bishal Bhari, AIT-RRCAP
17:00-17:10	Q&A	Facilitated By: Ashley Bastiansz (BRI)
17:10-17:15	Closing Remark	Thomas Verbaere, UNEP