Policy Update on Mercury Waste Management in Japan

Japan has been reviewing existing laws and regulations on mercury waste management in order to further promote environmentally sound management of mercury wastes. Updates on the latest management policy of mercury waste are as follows:

1. Establishment of a new waste category: “Dust and other wastes containing mercury”

- Japan has established a new waste category: “Dust and other wastes containing mercury,” which corresponds to the category “substances or objects contaminated with mercury or mercury compounds” under Article 11 of the Minamata Convention. This new category includes burnt residues, dust, sludge, waste acid, waste alkali, and slag containing mercury or mercury compounds with a mercury concentration of more than X mg/kg. This threshold X is planned to be 15mg/kg and is being solicited for public comments.
- In Japan, an existing waste category, “specifically controlled industrial wastes” refers to wastes generated from the specified facilities, exceeding 0.005 mg-Hg/L in Japan’s official leaching test, and requiring specific permission for its treatment. This category also corresponds to the category “substances or objects contaminated with mercury or mercury compounds” under Article 11 of the Minamata Convention. “Dust and other wastes containing mercury” covers wastes which is not included in “specifically controlled industrial waste”.
- “Dust and other wastes containing mercury” must be appropriately labelled in their manifest. Moreover, it is crucial to pay particular attention to preventing evaporation and spillage of mercury into the environment during transportation and treatment.
- Mercury must be recovered from all “Dust and other wastes containing mercury” with a mercury concentration of at least Y mg/kg prior to their disposal. This threshold Y is planned to be 1,000mg/kg and is being solicited for public comments.

2. Establishment of a new waste category: “Industrial wastes of mercury-added products”

- Japan has also established another new waste category: “Industrial wastes of mercury-added products,” which corresponds to the category, “substances or objects containing mercury or mercury compounds” under Article 11 of the Minamata Convention. Products to be categorized as “industrial wastes of mercury-added products” will be selected not according to the mercury content but according to the product types. Public comments are being solicited for the subject products.
- “Industrial wastes of mercury-added products” must be appropriately packaged and labelled. Moreover, it is crucial to pay particular attention to preventing evaporation and spillage of mercury into the environment during transportation and treatment. It is prohibited to mix “industrial wastes of mercury-added products” with other types of waste and dispose them in landfills dedicated for inert wastes such as uncontaminated plastics, metals, and glasses.
- Mercury must be recovered from “Industrial wastes of mercury-added products” such as sphygmomanometers which contain elemental mercury prior to their disposal. Public comments are being solicited for the subject products.

Use of mercury waste thresholds or similar device	Threshold level	Additional information
・Thresholds for wastes contaminated with mercury or mercury compounds	Planned to be determined according to the mercury content (>15mg/kg)	
・Thresholds for wastes contaminated with mercury or mercury compounds subject to mercury recovery prior to their disposal	Planned to be determined according to the mercury content (≧1,000mg/kg)	
・Thresholds for industrial wastes of mercury-added products	Planned to be determined according to the product types	
・Thresholds for industrial wastes of mercury-added products subject to mercury recovery prior to their disposal		