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The first Conference of the Parties (COP1) to the United Nations' Minamata Convention on Mercury will convene next month in Geneva, Switzerland. This is timely in view of the US government's intention to rekindle coal burning for energy. Coal is a major source of mercury pollution, which has well-documented adverse effects on the environment and human health (O. A. Ogunseitan *Environ. Sci. Policy Sustain. Dev.* **59**, 4–13; 2017).

It is challenging to translate multilateral agreements to national policies, as illustrated by the US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement this year. The United States was the first country to ratify the Minamata Convention. But there are gaps in the alignment of the US domestic agenda with the international framework for pollution prevention that should be high on the agenda for COP1.

The first gap deals with the policy interpretation of scientific uncertainty about mercury's toxicity, with implications for the continuing use of the metal in tooth fillings. The second involves promoting safer alternatives to mercury, including its use in fluorescent lighting. The third and least-understood gap arises from the roles of civic society and transborder institutions in harmonizing domestic and international policies on mercury.

COP1 participants should encourage scientists to educate the public worldwide about the crucial importance of the convention.

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