



# A PRACTICAL GUIDE

## REDUCING MERCURY USE IN ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE GOLD MINING





**1972-2012:**  
Serving People  
and the Planet



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The primary authors of this document are Kevin Telmer and Daniel Stapper of the Artisanal Gold Council (AGC). All of the photographs and images in the document with the exception of those specifically indicated are property of the Artisanal Gold Council and can not be used without permission.

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# Reducing Mercury Use in Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining

A Practical Guide



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produced in conjunction with Artisanal Gold Council.  
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Pieces of 'sponge gold' in this photograph are the result of mercury amalgamation. Each piece of sponge gold represents a day of work for a group of miners. The large ball in the foreground, is 8 grams - worth 385 USD, at a price of 1500 USD/ounce.



Miners attending a training session in Mozambique

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is an important development opportunity which can contribute directly to poverty alleviation and regional development. Although social and environmental problems are common in this sector, there is also an opportunity to transform mineral wealth into lasting local development.

# Perspective

1. Gold can represent an excellent method of transferring wealth to rural communities: small-scale producers often get 70% or more of international prices, even in remote areas. This is much higher than other products such as coffee, bananas, etc.
2. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) needs to be brought into the formal economy to maximize benefits and enable improvements
3. In order to comply with modern environmental standards, reducing mercury use is a key step in realizing ASGM development opportunities

## Who can use this document?

Policy makers, miners and civil society can use this document to learn about technologies and approaches for reducing and eliminating mercury use in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM).

### **Governments:**

- A simple educational and planning tool for technical aspects of intervention programs and policy considerations
- A decision tool to understand best practice options
- An explanation of the technical fundamentals that underpin and encourage formalization of the ASGM sector

### **Miners:**

- A graphic introduction of best practices
- A guide on how local conditions influence possible improvements in mining practices
- An explanation of barriers to be overcome to improve practices and reduce mercury use

### **Civil society:**

- An educational tool to better understand ASGM
- An explanation of barriers that mining communities face when trying to improve mining practices and reduce mercury use

## Why worry about mercury?

Mercury is a powerful neurotoxin that is harmful to people, but especially to developing fetuses, and young children. Once emitted, mercury can travel great distances through the atmosphere, causing global contamination of ecosystems, fish, birds, mammals, and the human food chain. Worldwide, consumption of mercury contaminated seafood puts billions of people at risk of mercury poisoning, which affects brain and nervous system development and function. Local exposures in mining communities that use mercury can be even more acute.



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