

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Lead Pollution, The Silent Killer: Needs Urgent Attention and Multi-Sectoral Actions**

July 2021, Dhaka, Bangladesh - “Together, we can end the lead pollution” with this call to action, Pure Earth Bangladesh, in coordination with the Bangladesh Department of Environment (DoE) and with support from United States Agency for International Development (under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAAA-16-00019), OAK Foundation, Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation SDC, and the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP) held a virtual workshop titled ‘Advancing a Lead Pollution and Health Roadmap for Bangladesh’. The workshop convened stakeholders to share the state of knowledge about lead exposure from all sources in Bangladesh; build a common understanding of the related challenges, and lay the groundwork for a unified approach to lead exposure reduction.

The speakers and participants of the event have shared many recommendations to improve the lead pollution situation, with a particular emphasis on establishing a multi-stakeholder approach with the leadership of the relevant government ministries to eradicate community lead exposure. Participants also discussed preparing comprehensive lead pollution studies, developing a national inventory on lead pollution sources, and importantly, a time-bound national action plan.

They have also suggested ensuring improved occupational health safety in lead-related industries, identifying community areas that are contaminated with lead and taking steps to restore these communities, increasing the monitoring capacity of the Department of Environment and the Ministry of Industry, addressing the import of lead chromate as a pigment, and ensuring effective industrial waste management.

Bangladesh is one of the most lead-impacted countries in the world. It experiences the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of death from lead exposure. More than 36 million children are exposed to lead. The average blood lead level in children in Bangladesh is 7.5mcg/dL, which is 50% higher than the common health guidelines. Comparing the severity of this situation to the covid pandemic, the Chief Guest of the event **Mr. Ahmed Shamim Al Razi, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change** said, “The whole earth is shivering from the threat of Covid 19, but the threat of lead and other pollutants can in no case be underestimated. Lead is the silent killer, unlike COVID-19.” The minister has committed to treating the eradication of lead exposures as one of the biggest priorities of the ministry. “The Department of Environment should take the lead to mainstream this issue with proper actions as this department is committed to preventing exposures to hazardous chemicals,” he said. “Research institutions and universities should come up with ways to shift illegal, informal Used lead-acid batteries

(ULAB) recycling industries to the regulated, registered sector. We also have to identify the community areas that are contaminated with lead and take steps to return them to as a safe place.”

The sources of poisonous lead are widespread starting from ULAB to spices, lead-based paint, cosmetics, aluminum cookware, traditional medicine, etc. Expressing concern in this situation the Chair of the event **Mr. Md Ashraf Uddin, Director General, Department of Environment (DoE)** said, “We are unknowingly eating and breathing poisonous lead. The common people of the country and all our families need to be aware of this and talk about it. We need to work together to solve this global problem, and I think Pure Earth opened that door with today's event.” “It's damage to the human body and environment is irreparable,” he added.

Lead pollution is not the only environmental, health, and economic issue, it impacts education, societal stability, and climate solutions. Though the problem is humongous, the initiatives are intermittent and siloed. There is also a lack of communication and coordination. Pointing this out, **Andrew McCartor, VP, Strategy, and Partnerships, Pure Earth** said, “The government has to take the lead role in devising a national strategy for handling this problem. We need to address the lack of a common set of goals and strategies to advance a holistic national approach,” he noted. “If lead is in soil, it stays hundred years if it is not cleaned. This is a continuous threat to generation after generation.”

The participants and speakers also highlighted the need for mechanisms to shift illegal, informal used lead-acid battery recycling industries to registered facilities, and consider options for alternative livelihoods among workers in informal lead industries. There were also suggestions for awareness building among the public and policymakers, and the organization of various training sessions and workshops to enhance the knowledge and skills of stakeholders related to lead pollution.

The two-hour-long workshop was enriched with more than 65 diverse sets of experts representing government agencies, national and international civil society organizations, research and academic institutions, development agencies, and media.

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