

Settlement For 500 Former Workers In Kodaikanal India Following Mercury Contamination

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Related Practice Areas: **Human Rights and Environmental Disputes**

Hausfeld recently settled a case in Kodaikanal, India, on behalf of 500 former workers of a thermometer factory, who had been living with the adverse health effects of mercury contamination. They had alleged that their employer, Unilever's subsidiary, had consistently failed to protect them from harm – first by not informing them of the substance they were handling, and then by not implementing any appropriate health and safety procedures to protect them from the effects of the mercury.

Many of the workers reported that they went on to suffer neurological effects, including tremors and loss of memory – they also suffered from loss of teeth, infertility and skin problems. Further, due to the lack of health and safety, the workers had unwittingly taken the substance home with them, for instance in their clothes, which resulted in their children suffering the same effects. Worse still, the children born to women who had worked there were also harmed, suffering neurological damage, organ defects, blue baby syndrome and premature delivery.

The workers attempted to get justice for 15 years through the Madras courts – without success. We investigated their claims, working closely with the existing legal team, and ultimately issued proceedings against Unilever in the High Court. We then worked with the Indian legal team to achieve settlement, which occurred only 11 months after we had issued proceedings, demonstrating the power of holding the parent company to account in its home state.