International POPs Elimination Network

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Mercury-Contaminated Fish To Be Served To Delegates at International Mercury Treaty Negotiations

(Chiba, Japan) Delegates to the second UN negotiating meeting for a global mercury treaty will have the opportunity to taste fish under public advisory for mercury contamination.

At 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 25 January, 2011, members of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) will distribute more than 300 samples of canned tuna. Canned albacore tuna is so contaminated that only one serving per week exceeds recommended levels for children and women of childbearing age.[1] The fish tasting will take place on the second floor of the Makuhari Messe Convention Center in front of Plenary Hall.

"Japan's Minamata victims were poisoned by mercury from fish and other seafood. Japan and the world need a treaty that makes fish safe to eat by eliminating all human sources of mercury," said Takeshi Yasuma, Citizens Against Chemical Pollution (Japan).

It is estimated that around 60 percent of people in many developing countries depend on fish for over 30 percent of their animal protein supplies.[2]

"We want the delegates to negotiate the mercury treaty from a fish-eaters point of view," said Imogen Ingram, Island Sustainability Alliance based in the Cook Islands. "Small Island Developing States rely on fish for food and delegates need to act to protect our children."

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[1] A sampling of 42 tuna samples conducted by Consumer Reports in the US in 2006 found that samples of white tuna had 0.217 to 0.774 ppm of mercury and averaged 0.427 ppm. By eating 2.5 ounces of any of the tested samples, a woman of childbearing age would exceed the daily mercury intake that the EPA considers safe. A 2007 EPA update found average numbers for Atlantic albacore tuna to be .470 ppm. Since tuna is an open ocean fish, these data are relevant the world over.

[2] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/12319/en .

Mercury accumulates in tuna and other fish in an especially toxic form, methylmercury, which comes from mercury released primarily by coal-fired power plants cement kilns, and mining activities. Mercury catalysts used in chemical production, as in Minamata, are another significant source.

Other sources include mercury-containing products and devices, metal refining and recycling, and waste dumps and incinerators.

Mercury is transformed into methyl mercury by micro-organisms in the environment, which then accumulates up the food chain as larger fish eat smaller ones.

Long-range transport through the air makes mercury is a global issue. High mercury levels are observed in the Arctic, for example, far from the sources of any significant releases.

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For background information and references on mercury, download *"An NGO Introduction to Mercury Pollution" on the IPEN Mercury-Free Campaign website:*, http://www.ipen.org/hgfree/

The International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN) is a global public interest NGO network with more than 700 Participating Organizations in 100 countries in all regions. IPEN Participating Organizations in many countries and in all regions collaborated to advance the common goal of creating a strong and effective global POPs treaty. IPEN now works with NGOs at regional, national, district and community levels in support of POPs elimination efforts at a step toward a future world where toxic chemicals no longer cause harm to human health or to the environment. www.ipen.org