

Thursday, March 11, 2004

San Francisco- A California-based nonprofit organization today released an easy-to-use online seafood mercury calculator (<http://www.gotmercury.org> ) to help consumers make informed choices about their seafood consumption. The calculator allows consumers to calculate what their blood mercury levels would be from eating mercury-contaminated seafood and compare it to values that are considered safe by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

"The dangers of mercury are so great that if we had our way, we would have this tool in front of every seafood counter in America; it takes the guesswork out of seafood consumption", says Andy Peri of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project.

"It's really simple to use: you type in your weight, choose the seafood item from the menu, enter the amount you eat per week, and just hit the 'calculate' button and you automatically learn whether or not you exceed the EPA safe limit of mercury", says Peri.

"In the absence of adequate warnings by government agencies and warning signs across the nation, women of child-bearing age now have a tool they can use to protect themselves and their children from being poisoned by mercury," says Peri.

Many consumers are not aware, for example, that a 115 pound women consuming just two cans of albacore tuna in a week puts her 310% above what the EPA and FDA considers safe; a child weighing 45 pounds eating just one can of albacore tuna per week would get a dose 420% higher than the EPA's safe limit of .1 microgram/kilogram-day of mercury exposure. The same person consuming swordfish would have mercury level of more than three times that high.

Methylmercury?the organic form of mercury found in many species of fish?is a potent neurotoxin that can cause nervous system and brain damage in developing fetuses, infants, and young children. In a new finding announced last month, EPA scientists found that 630,000 babies, which represents 15% off the babies born in the United States, are exposed to dangerously high levels of mercury in the womb.

Under Proposition 65, California requires warning signs to be posted in areas where fish is being sold but the signs are not adequate to protect public health from fish containing medium to high levels of mercury. The warning applies only to fish containing extremely high levels of mercury. Canned tuna, the second most popular seafood consumed in the United States, is not highlighted on warning signs. However, exposure from both types of canned tuna can be determined on the new calculator.

The Sea Turtle Restoration Project's testing of mercury contaminated seafood led to the California Attorney General suing state supermarkets, such as Safeway, for their failure to post the legally mandated warning signs. A final settlement on this case is expected shortly.

The FDA, like California, only warns women of child bearing age to avoid fish with the

highest levels of mercury; they include: shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish"  
<http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/mehgadvisory1208.html>.

The Sea Turtle Restoration Project is a California-based marine conservation organization that works to protect sea turtles and other marine species nationally and internationally. Many seafood species that are high in mercury are caught using longline fishing methods that kill large numbers of sea turtles every year. We work to help consumers find ways to protect their own health by eating species low in mercury and, at the same time not eating fish such as swordfish, which is responsible for pushing sea turtles to the brink of extinction. For more information about sea turtles and the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, please visit: <http://www.seaturtles.org>

For more information on mercury in seafood and marine species protection, please visit the Sea Turtle Restoration Project website by visiting [www.seaturtles.org](http://www.seaturtles.org) and clicking on Program and Campaigns then Mercury, Swordfish and Sea Turtles Campaigns or visit: [http://www.seaturtles.org/prog\\_camp2.cfm?campaignID=20](http://www.seaturtles.org/prog_camp2.cfm?campaignID=20)

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