

Started in California, it is more than likely that lawsuits on methyl mercury will work its way across the country as more and more environmental lawyers see a chance for big bucks. These are radical groups working in conjunction for the complete demolition of the us seafood industry. Where does all their funding come from? Makes me wonder. - Bob Jones

TrendTrackT Report

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SnapShot Highlights:

[Mercury Levels - Seafood: Update #5]

**California Sues Major Food Store Chains for Selling Contaminated Seafood
Groups Warn of National Mercury Crisis**

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan 22, 2003 (ASCRIBE NEWS via COMTEX) – Environmental groups are warning consumers across the nation that the recent suit by California against seafood retailers for selling fish contaminated with mercury is not unique to California, and is an unreported national crisis. Last week, the Attorney General's office of California filed suit against major seafood retailers for not warning their customers that their swordfish and tuna are contaminated with levels of methylmercury that are in violation of the state's toxic law, Proposition 65. The state lawsuit was spurred on by undercover testing conducted by the California-based Turtle Island Restoration Network and As You Sow Foundation.

After reviewing the mercury levels uncovered by the environmental groups' testing, the Attorney General took up the cause in the name of the public interest. The Attorney General's office has filed suit against Albertson's, Safeway, The Kroger Company, Trader Joe's and Whole Foods. Suits against Red Lobster, Andronico's Markets and Costco should follow in the near future as testing revealed dangerously high levels at those retailers as well.

Laboratory results from testing procedures performed on samples of fresh swordfish taken from Safeway, Albertson's, Trader Joe's, Whole Foods and the Kroger Company (which includes Ralph's, Cala Foods, Bell Markets and others) have revealed dangerously high levels of methylmercury. Fresh tuna samples also showed dangerous levels of methylmercury, though lower than those found in swordfish.

"The public health threats of mercury contaminated seafood, particularly swordfish, are too great to ignore," explains Doug Israel, Project Director for the Turtle Island Restoration Network, "All retailers, as well as the public health agencies of every state, have an obligation to protect the public from harmful

mercury ingestion."

The two California organizations sponsored the testing regime in order to determine if retailers were selling mercury-contaminated seafood to their customers. On November 14, 2002, both groups filed a 60-day notice of intent to sue under Proposition 65, a voter-approved California law that requires retailers to inform customers of products that they sell that contain cancer-causing agents or compounds that are known to cause reproductive toxicity.

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State public health agencies and the federal government have been slow to act to protect the public health from mercury contamination of seafood. "Unfortunately, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Bush Administration in general, has shown itself to be beholden to special interests, and they have dragged their feet on this issue for too long," added Doug Israel. The two groups that filed the lawsuit are hoping that California's bold stance on this serious public health threat will cause other states to take aggressive action as well.

Methylmercury ingestion is the most common form of mercury poisoning in this country. According to the Environmental Protection Agency and public health bodies, high levels of methylmercury in the bloodstream are known to cause central nervous system effects such as impairment of vision, motor incoordination, loss of feeling, and at high doses, seizures, very severe neurological impairment, and death. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns pregnant women, nursing mothers and women of childbearing age not to consume swordfish, tilefish, shark or mackerel due to their high levels of methylmercury contamination. However, the effects are not limited to women and children.

Recent research reveals that high levels of mercury in the bloodstream can cause sterility in men and women, and an increased risk of heart failure.

While mercury is a naturally occurring element in our environment, ambient levels have increased due to industrial manufacturing processes such as the burning of coal for power and the production of batteries and other materials.

Both groups involved in the law suit are concerned not only about exposure to the substance, but to the prevalence of mercury compounds in our environment. "Eliminating exposure to mercury is a battle we have to confront head-on," states

Larry Fahn, Executive Director of the As You Sow Foundation.

The Turtle Island Restoration Network is also concerned with the impacts of longline fishing for swordfish on endangered leatherback sea turtles and the marine environment. The high demand for this seafood drives a vast industrial longline fishery that sets 2-10 billion baited hooks per year, capturing and killing a myriad of marine life including critically endangered leatherback sea turtles. With less than 4,000 nesting leatherback females in the Pacific the threat to their existence is imminent. "People can protect their own health and our oceans by simply not eating swordfish," said Doug Israel.

Turtle Island Restoration Network is an international marine environmental organization headquartered in Forest Knolls, CA and with offices in Costa Rica and Texas. The organization focuses on protecting restoring marine wildlife in ways that address the needs of local communities. The organization's two primary projects are the Sea Turtle Restoration Project (www.seaturtles.org) and the Salmon Protection and Watershed Network (www.spawnusa.org).

As You Sow is a nonprofit organization incorporated in California and dedicated to, among other causes, the protection of the environment, the promotion of human health, the improvement of worker and consumer safety and environmental education. The organization's website can be found at www.asyousow.org.