



City of Cambridge

O-34.

IN CITY COUNCIL

July 30, 2001

COUNCILLOR BORN
COUNCILLOR BRAUDE
COUNCILLOR DAVIS
COUNCILLOR DECKER
MAYOR GALLUCCIO
VICE MAYOR MAHER
COUNCILLOR REEVES
COUNCILLOR SULLIVAN
COUNCILLOR TOOMEY

WHEREAS: Recent news reports on dangerous levels of the toxic chemical mercury in fish (see attached Boston Globe article) document a connection between improper disposal of batteries and dangerous levels of mercury in the environment; now therefore be it

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Chief Public Health Officer and the Commissioner of Public Works to develop convenient methods for safe disposal of batteries, perhaps using the model of street battery disposal containers adopted in several European cities; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the City Council on this matter.

In City Council July 30, 2001.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

KB

W/F

Recent news reports on dangerous levels of the toxic chemical ~~fish~~ mercury in fish (see attached Boston Globe article) (~~connect the~~) document a connection between [~~this mercury poisoning~~ dangerous levels of mercury] improper disposal of batteries and dangerous levels of mercury in the environment; now there've been

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 25, 2001

Mercury levels in fish bring warning

By Mac Daniel
GLOBE STAFF

In a far-reaching warning about mercury contamination, Massachusetts public health officials yesterday urged young women and children under age 12 to stop eating most fish from the state's lakes and streams as well as some types of seafood.

The state has long warned that the meat of some freshwater fish contains toxic mercury, but until yesterday, officials had simply urged caution in eating fish from water bodies with high mercury levels. Now, the "do not eat" warning applies to all freshwater fish statewide except for fish that are raised in captivity and released in stocking programs.

The advisory for the first time warns against eating some saltwater fish, previously believed to be relatively free of mercury contamination. Shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish, and tuna (one of the most popular fish served as sushi) are all listed as saltwater fish to avoid.

The Department of Public Health even asked the public to limit consumption of canned tuna, especially white or chunk white tuna, which may contain higher levels of mercury.

The warnings, easily the most stringent in New England, could have an impact on the camping, fishing, and sporting goods industries at the height of summer. But state officials said they needed to act in response to a recent increase in statewide testing data showing widespread mercury contamination in fish, as well as a US Food and Drug Administration advisory

Young women, children urged to avoid some fish

► FISH
Continued from Page A1

issued in January.

"What we're trying to do today is put the message out a little more clearly," said Suzanne Condon, assistant commissioner for the state Department of Public Health.

The new warnings won praise from environmental activists, who have been pressing for stronger action on mercury for years.

"The health department should be commended for its farsightedness," said Michael Bender, executive director of the Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project. "It's better to err on the side of safety in protecting children and newborns."

But people who make their livelihood off local waters downplayed the warning.

"Our customers don't necessarily take the fish to eat," said Michael MacAskill, general manager of the Goose Hummock Shop in Orleans, one of the largest outdoor equipment stores on Cape Cod. "The bottom line is, 75 to 80 percent of our customers are doing catch and release. I can say I may have been asked a handful of times in 10 years what you're talking about. Maybe it'll come up more now."

Mercury, a naturally occurring metal, is also released by burning

trash or coal. Once in the air, the toxic metal can travel huge distances before entering soil and water — Massachusetts officials believe much of the mercury falling here comes from Midwestern coal-burning plants. Improper disposal of batteries and mercury thermometers has added to the problem.

Exposure to mercury is particularly destructive for the developing nervous systems of the fetus or young child, research shows, leading to behavioral or learning problems. That's why the warning targets all women of child-bearing age.

Public Health's Condon said women concerned about their own or their children's consumption of fish should contact their physician or pediatrician, who can administer a simple urinary mercury test. She also said those concerned can call the Department of Public Health at 617-624-5757 with questions.

Because of mercury's extreme toxicity, Northeastern US and Canadian officials have agreed to attempt to reduce emissions to nearly zero. In April, Acting Governor Jane Swift signed legislation designed to limit mercury emissions in older power plants. An Arlington state representative is sponsoring a bill to ban the sale of mercury thermometers in Massachusetts.

Mercury activist Bender said the problem is so pervasive that a 1994 study found that, even if all manmade mercury emissions

stopped, it would take 15 to 20 years before mercury levels in the environment and fish would drop to safe levels.

But Wally Stevens, president of Slade Groton & Co. of Boston, and chairman of the National Fisheries Institute, a 1,000-member fishing industry group, called the advisory irresponsible.

"It could have a very harmful effect if people stop eating seafood," he said. "There has been good science that supports the value of eating seafood. And to have an advisory based on weak science at best doesn't quite seem like a level playing field."

Roger Berkowitz, CEO of Legal Sea Foods restaurant chain, says the stringent warning should be taken in moderation.

"The reality is, or the big question is, are the [mercury] amounts in [fish] safe for consumption," he said. "I don't want to have anything on my menu that's the least bit harmful to the public. But what comes out time and time again is that anytime you eat this fish, especially in moderation, there's really no problem."

State health officials now plan to take their advisory to the streets, with ads on MBTA transit lines and outreach to community

health clinics, Condon said.

One area of concentration will be the Merrimack Valley, where many Cambodian residents significantly supplement their diets with fish they catch, raising potentially serious health concerns. Twenty-four of the 26 bodies of water tested in the region showed high levels of mercury, health officials said.

Condon recommended that the public choose a variety of fish and shellfish and buy them from different sources. Fish shown to have lower levels of mercury and thus can be eaten in larger amounts include cod, pollock, haddock, and flounder.

Past advisories on carcinogenic PCB contamination remain in effect, including those against eating lobster tomalley

[the soft green innards found in lobster tails and bodies], bluefish, lobster from New Bedford Harbor, and lobster, flounder, soft shell clams and other bivalves from Boston Harbor.

The state Department of Health currently has 111 fish consumption advisories for specific bodies of water in the Commonwealth. The full list can be found at the department's Web site at <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/beha/fishlist.htm>.

'The health department should be commended for its farsightedness. It's better to err on the side of safety.'

MICHAEL BENDER
Mercury Policy Project

Eating safely

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health is advising that women who are or may become pregnant, nursing mothers, and children under age 12 avoid certain local fish because of the risk of mercury and/or PCB contamination.

Do not eat:

- Freshwater fish caught in streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds in Massachusetts.
- Lobster from New Bedford Harbor.
- Swordfish, shark, king mackerel, tilefish, or tuna steak.
- Bluefish caught off the Massachusetts coast.

It is safe to eat:

- Up to 12 ounces (two meals) per week of fish that are stocked in streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds in Massachusetts.
- Cod, haddock, flounder, and pollock in larger amounts.

In addition, the department advises that no one should eat lobster tomalley, or fish and shellfish from the inner areas of New Bedford Harbor.

For more information, call the department's Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment at 617-624-5757, or visit the Web site at

<http://www.state.ma.us/dph/beha>

SOURCE: Mass. Department of Public Health

GLOBE STAFF GRAPHIC/JOE YONAN

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230 CM

Order #34

Develop convenient methods for
safe disposal of batteries.

Councillor Born

In City Council July 30, 2001

Order adopted