



March 6, 2007

For immediate release

Pollution Probe calls for a national strategy to reduce and eliminate mercury pollution

TORONTO, ON — Health Canada’s recent advisory for albacore canned tuna may not be good news for consumer safety according to a CBC story released Friday, March 2, 2007 entitled “Expand canned tuna advisory, add labels: scientists.” For this reason, and others, Pollution Probe would like to see the Government of Canada take solid steps to lower mercury pollution in the environment. We call upon the Government of Canada to develop a national strategy to reduce and eliminate domestic sources of mercury pollution, as well as to support the development of a binding international agreement to reduce human-generated global sources of this toxic substance.

“Seeing that much of Canada’s mercury pollution comes from global sources, it is puzzling that Canada didn’t step up to the plate at the February 5–9, 2007 UNEP Governing Council meeting on mercury and join countries that were calling for a legally binding instrument to address global mercury pollution,” says Ken Ogilvie, Executive Director of Pollution Probe. “The ultimate goal of the Government of Canada should be the elimination of human-generated sources of mercury pollution — this would reduce or remove the need for advisories warning the public against eating otherwise healthy food sources. We need to stop reacting to the problem and start finding proactive ways to eliminate mercury pollution.”

Health Canada’s recent advisory warned pregnant women and children to limit their consumption of albacore or “white” canned tuna and provided the following advice to vulnerable populations:

- Women who are or who may become pregnant, or who are breastfeeding, can eat up to four Food Guide Servings of canned albacore tuna each week (one Food Guide Serving is 75 g, 2½ oz, 125 mL or ½ cup).
- Children between one and four years old can eat up to one Food Guide Serving of albacore tuna each week.
- Children between five and eleven years old can eat up to two Food Guide Servings of albacore tuna each week.

In comparison, US consumption guidelines range from one can a week to one can a month for pregnant women and children.

The advisory was prompted by CBC test results (February 20, 2007) showing that vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women and children, are putting their health at risk if they eat canned tuna, particularly albacore, due to mercury contamination. Thirteen

per cent of the albacore canned tuna in the study had average mercury levels over Health Canada's safe limit of 0.5 ppm.

In a more recent CBC story (March 2, 2007) a Canadian woman, Maureen Hayes, came forward saying she has suffered serious medical problems as a result of eating too much albacore tuna. The CBC contacted Dr. Donna Mergler, a professor who specializes in mercury at the University of Quebec at Montreal, who said the federal government should extend its advisory to everyone (not just pregnant women and children), and put labels on cans of fish containing high levels of mercury.

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that especially threatens the brains and nervous systems of fetuses and young children. People are exposed to mercury largely through the consumption of large predatory fish, such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and certain types of tuna. Based on actual test data, US government studies indicate that one out of ten women of childbearing-age has blood mercury levels above that considered safe for the developing fetus. Coal-fired power plants, cement kilns, waste incinerators and other industrial sources emit mercury into the environment.

For further information about mercury, see Pollution Probe's *Mercury in the Environment: A Primer* (www.pollutionprobe.org/Publications/Primers.htm). For more information about fish testing see the Mercury Policy Project's report *Can the Tuna* (www.mercurypolicy.org/new/documents/CanTheTuna061903.pdf).

- 30 -

Contact Information:

Ken Ogilvie
Executive Director, Pollution Probe
416-926-1907 x231