

THE greenREPORT



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EPA Pulls Fast One with New Mercury Rules

After delaying its decision on new mercury emissions rules for months to allow time for public comments and reviews of various issues, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) essentially announced, on March 15, that it preferred to ignore public health, disregard facts, and cater solely to the interests of big business.

Holding the party line of the Bush Administration, the EPA has now adopted a market-based, business-friendly, environmentally-suspect cap-and-trade system for coal-fired power plants—one of the biggest sources of mercury emissions in this country—instead of mandating mercury scrubbers and other technologies that would really make a difference. (For an explanation of cap-and-trade systems, see the sidebar article on this page.)

“The administration is showing a blatant disregard for the health of children, the health of women of childbearing age, but they are also showing a blatant disregard for the law,” said Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT), who had asked the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office for a report which showed that the Bush Administration failed to take into account the impact of mercury on human brain development, learning ability and neurological functioning.

Protecting our food from environmental toxins has been a major priority since Generation Green’s inception, and we advocate for stringent reduction and prevention, proper storage and handling, and public right-to-know.



Mercury Risks

Mercury is considered one of the most toxic power plant emissions because it can cause severe damage in the developing brains of fetuses and children. It can also damage the bodies of adults. Power plants discharge the metal into the air, and it can travel hundreds or even thousands of miles before settling to the ground and being washed into lakes and streams. In parts of the country, pregnant women and children are urged not to eat fish because mercury can build up in the flesh of the fish.

(Learn more about our mercury stance at www.generationgreen.org/mercury-main.htm)

Coal-fired power plants are a critical target for emissions rules—a sentiment that EPA clearly doesn’t share right now. Technology exists, and is readily available, to reduce mercury emissions drastically from coal-fired power plants and other sources of mercury emissions.

The only reason not to use or to mandate such technologies is disregard of human health in favor of corporate interests.



For more information on this subject, visit our Web page at www.generationgreen.org/actionalertinfo/mercuryinfo.htm. In the coming weeks and months, Generation Green will continue to mobilize its members and organizational allies to fight against this misguided decision and demand that the new rules be rescinded and replaced with something that really will make a positive change. 🌱

Cap-and-Trade Explained

Cap-and-trade systems, also known as allowance trading, can be best summed up as “pollution credits.” Specific sources of air pollution (power plants, waste incineration facilities, etc.) are allowed to emit specific maximum amounts of various pollutants. Facilities that come in under that allowable limit can then sell their leftover allowances. This enables the facilities that buy up such allowances to pollute more, because other facilities are polluting less. That means some areas will, under the EPA’s new rules, get higher mercury levels than they had before.

Cap-and-trade regulatory models have been effective in decreasing emissions of certain pollutants because of their dispersal patterns or lower toxicity. But mercury emissions tend to concentrate nearer their source than do many other air pollutants. So, a cap-and-trade program may result in harm to children in certain communities where high mercury emissions would be allowed to continue or to expand. And with a substance as toxic as mercury, that is terrible news for our families.

A Sour Note with Splenda

Earlier this year, Generation Green called on the Federal Trade Commission to investigate Johnson & Johnson's McNeil Nutritionals for conducting a misleading marketing campaign for its artificial sweetener, Splenda.

Using the slogan, "made from sugar, so it tastes like sugar," the company has tried to give the impression that Splenda is natural. According to a recent survey by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, 47 percent of Splenda users incorrectly believed it was a natural product. Although the Splenda manufacturing process starts with sugar molecules, they are heavily modified by a complex chemical process that adds chlorine, and the final product is far from sugar.


"Any substance whose listed ingredients include 4-chloro-4-deoxy-alpha-D-galactopyranosyl1 cannot be considered natural," says Generation Green Executive Director Rochelle Davis.

There is no particular research to indicate that Splenda is harmful, but misleading marketing has helped give the product a 50 percent share of the artificial sweetener

market and perhaps has encouraged consumers to buy Splenda when they might otherwise have chosen other sweeteners with longer track records and more research to back up their safety.

"Parents need to have accurate information in order to make appropriate food choices for their families," Ms. Davis notes.

A major priority for Generation Green is protecting consumers' right to know. Misleading marketing robs you of the knowledge you need to make informed decisions about the foods and food-related products that your family eats.

To be led to believe that something is natural when it isn't is just as bad as lying to you about an expiration date or saying a product is organic when it is filled with hormones and antibiotics. If McNeil Nutritionals is confident in the safety of their product, they should be confident enough to market Splenda honestly and not to suggest it's nearly the same as sugar. To find out more about what Generation Green is doing to make that happen, visit www.generationgreen.org/2005-01_lead-story.htm. 



Teaming Up for Our Families


Generation Green is pleased to announce a new partnership with the Center for Environmental Health (CEH). By linking with the Center, our members will have an even stronger voice in the halls of government and corporate decision-makers.

Based in California, CEH works to protect the public from environmental and consumer health hazards through education, litigation, and advocacy. CEH is committed to environmental justice, reducing the use of toxic chemicals, supporting communities in their quest for a safer environment, and corporate accountability.



Their research, policy analysis and advocacy efforts will allow Generation Green members to receive the most timely and accurate analysis of public policy developments that impact our children's health.

"The Center for Environmental Health is thrilled to be developing this partnership with Generation Green," says Michael Green, CEH's executive director. "We have a great deal of respect for Generation Green's membership, and what they have been able to accomplish by speaking together. We think their passion and CEH's mission, to create healthier families by preventing pollution, make a great fit."

To learn more about CEH, visit their Web site at www.cehca.org. 

The Skinny on Artificial Sweeteners

A Look at the Most Popular Sugar Substitutes


Splenda

This is the brand-name product in the United States made from a sweetener known as sucralose. Sucralose is manufactured by complex chemical process that adds chlorine to sugar molecules to make them unusable by the body, and thus calorie-free. It can be used in baking, because it doesn't break down in high heat.

Nutrasweet and Equal

These are two brand names for products based on the sweetener aspartame. Aspartame is comprised of protein molecules that are found in many meats and dairy products and has almost no calories. Based on more than 20 years of research, the FDA deems aspartame safe, though there are some anecdotal reports and some researchers that continue to raise concerns about possible health risks.

Sweet'N Low

This product uses a mix of dextrose and saccharin—which contains no calories. Saccharin was associated with bladder cancer in the 1970s based largely on animal research. Subsequent research put many of those concerns into doubt, and in 2000, the FDA and the National Institutes of Health removed saccharin from their list of carcinogens. 

Fresh Choices

Make the Most of the Humble Spud

Potatoes account for more than a quarter of the vegetable intake of children (most of that in the form of french fries). Spuds seem unassuming and innocent, but they are among the foods highest in chemical residues. Studies by the U.S. Department of Agriculture have found 38 different contaminants on potatoes, including hormone-disrupting pesticides and the insecticide thiabendazole, which can cause brain and nervous system damage.




So, buy organic potatoes whenever you can. Or, if you see potatoes labeled "Protected Harvest," they can make a good substitute for organic potatoes because they are grown with techniques that reduce pests naturally, thus exposing them to fewer pesticides.

Because of the risk of pesticide and other chemical exposures, Generation Green wants people to be able to make more informed decisions related to food.

That's the main reason that Generation Green Executive Director Rochelle Davis, along with respected cookbook writer and food editor David Joachim, authored *Fresh Choices: More than 100 Easy Recipes for Pure Food When You Can't Buy 100% Organic*. The information about potatoes above is just a sample of what you'll find inside.

Fresh Choices is more than just a cookbook. It tells the story of the important connection between health, food, the environment, and the government policies that impact our food supply. This story is told through delicious recipes, useful charts, healthy eating recommendations, profiles of influential individuals and practical shopping tips.



For more information about *Fresh Choices* or to order a copy, visit www.generationgreen.org/cookbook-main.htm. 

Order the Fresh Choices cookbook from Generation Green and you will also get a free Shopper's Guide (image at left). If you don't have Internet access and want to order one or more cookbooks, send your order and check to: Generation Green, P.O. Box 7027, Evanston, IL 60201.

The price is \$12 for members and \$18.50 for non-members. Shipping and handling is \$3 per book.

Warm Potatoes With Mustard Herb Dressing



INGREDIENTS

12-14 medium organic red potatoes, scrubbed and cut into bite-size pieces
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon country-style Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon brown mustard
1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
½ teaspoon cracked black pepper or ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
½ teaspoon salt



DIRECTIONS

Put the potatoes in a steamer basket and set over a pan of simmering water. Cover and steam over medium heat until the potatoes are fork-tender, 10 to 12 minutes.

Meanwhile, mix together the oil, Dijon mustard, brown mustard, tarragon, dill, pepper and salt in a medium bowl. Add the hot potatoes and mix.

Let the potatoes sit covered with the dressing for a few minutes to soak up plenty of flavor. The dish is best served warm, but can also be served cold or at room temperature.

Makes four servings.

For the Littlest Ones

If your baby is old enough for real food but still lacks teeth, feel free to share the potatoes with him or her. Just set aside a few of the cooked potatoes before mixing with the dressing. Let cool slightly, then peel off the skins. Mash the spuds with a splash of olive oil. To thin further, mix in some breast milk or formula.

If your baby is a little older and has teeth, set aside some of the fully dressed potatoes. Let the spuds cool slightly and then mash them or cut them into very small pieces before serving to your little one.

Keeping the Heat on Irradiated Food

Each spring, food service directors around the country place their orders for food provided by the U.S. government through the commodity program for the next school year. Since 2003, when irradiated meat was made available through the commodity program, school food service directors have had to decide, among all the other choices, whether to purchase irradiated ground beef for the upcoming school year.



Educational and advocacy efforts by Generation Green, its members and other groups have been effective in keeping irradiated foods out of our schools. That's good, since irradiation destroys vital nutrients in food and poses potential health risks because it creates chemical byproducts in the food.

According to the group Public Citizen, last year, only Texas, Minnesota and Nebraska had enough requests to place orders for irradiated meat with the U.S.

Department of Agriculture. However, those orders were later canceled when they found out how much more it cost than normal meat and how little information they were able to get about the product. Also, some school districts in California, Illinois, Oklahoma, Washington and Tennessee requested irradiated ground beef, but because there were not enough requests overall, those states couldn't actually place orders for irradiated meat.

But despite this victory—and our success in getting language into the Child Nutrition Act last year that provides several protections related to irradiated food in schools—we must remain vigilant. Let your school districts know you don't want irradiated food served to your children. Otherwise, it might find its way onto menus in the future.



A joint campaign with Organic Consumers Association

For more information on what you can do, visit us online at www.generationgreen.org/irradiateinfo.htm. In addition to general information about irradiated food and our work in keeping school food healthy, you can find a sample letter to send to your school district's food service director regarding irradiated food.



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Call us

STAY INFORMED. GET INVOLVED. SIGN UP FOR OUR MONTHLY ACTION ALERT!