

THE greenREPORT



Winter 2005

Feds Stomp on States' Mercury Efforts

It is no longer sufficient, apparently, for the federal government to be increasingly at the beck and call of corporate powers and to weaken or eliminate federal laws that protect our environment and help reduce exposure to toxins, particularly for our most vulnerable citizens: the children. Now, more and more, the feds are trying to step in and limit states' ability to regulate their own environments. We at Generation Green and our partner organization, the Center for Environmental Health, are extremely concerned about this trend, particularly as it relates to mercury in our environment—given that mercury can be so damaging to the developing neurological systems of children.


New and proposed federal rules or laws could, for example, overturn attempts by states like California and Massachusetts to ban thimerosal, a vaccine preservative (containing mercury) that some experts fear might contribute to growing rates of autism. Meddling by the feds could also thwart efforts in New England to control pollution wafting over from other states—and some sources of this pollution, such as power plants and waste incinerators, contribute to increases in mercury levels. And California's attempts to enforce its own Proposition 65, including efforts to get mercury warnings on canned tuna (seafood being one of the main ways humans consume mercury spewed into the environment), could also be stymied.

"Policy-makers in Washington claim they are simply making rules uniform and easier to follow," says Michael Green, executive director of the Center for Environmental Health, Generation Green's strategic partner. "It's difficult to accept this argument, especially when you see that new standards set out by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency circumvent and

nullify the Clean Air Act. Federal action in recent years has simply favored businesses and weakened protections for people. Government officials talk about uniformity and consistency, but this is clearly an attempt to undermine more protective standards at the state level, and it undermines these higher standards for the benefit of polluting industries that compromise our health. People who care about public health are forced to ask: why do the recent federal government efforts to make environmental standards 'uniform' usually opt in favor of standards that increase pollution?"

"It's a whole pattern of accumulating power in Washington [through] federal agencies that is more extensive than any administration in the history of this country," said California Attorney General Bill Lockyer recently. He maintains that attempts by the FDA to head off his state's requirement for canned tuna warnings have been prompted by the seafood industry, suggesting that government "concern" is more about business than public health or legislative consistency.

A recent red flag on the mercury issue is found in an analysis by an EPA scientist, based on research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that indicated women in coastal communities have twice as much mercury in their blood as those living inland. This provides fresh evidence of the link between fish consumption and concentrations of methylmercury in humans, and should be reason enough for the government to either step up to the plate, or step back and let states impose real mercury control rules.

Through your involvement with Generation Green and on your own, change can be made, though. It won't be easy or quick, most likely, but it can happen. If you don't already receive monthly action alerts from us, many of which touch on the mercury issue, please sign up. You can even authorize Generation Green to send action letters on your behalf automatically to save you time. (You still have the option each month of telling us not to send such letters, if you choose.) To participate in this Monthly Action Alert Network, please contact us by calling (800) 652-0827, sending an e-mail to mary@generationgreen.org or signing up online at www.generationgreen.org/Get%20Updates.htm. 



Hitting the Bottles

Ever wondered about the environmental and food-related health issues related to the use of plastic containers? If you have, you can go to www.environmentalobservatory.org/library.cfm?refid=77083 to find out all the nitty-gritty details. If you've never wondered about such issues, it's probably still a good idea to visit the site and see what you might want to be concerned about or not.

Would Your Kids Like Lead With Lunch?


You might carefully choose the foods for your children's lunches. You probably shop for food that doesn't expose your child to toxic chemicals. What a shame it would be, then, to find that the lunchbox your child uses is itself a potential source of toxicity. But that may indeed be the case. In August, the Center for Environmental Health (CEH), a partner organization of Generation Green, announced their legal action against makers and retailers of various soft vinyl lunchboxes that could expose children to harmful levels of lead.

CEH commissioned independent laboratory testing that has already found 24 lunchboxes with high lead levels. The level of lead in one lunchbox tested at 56,400 parts per million (ppm) of lead, more than 90 times the 600 ppm legal limit for lead in paint in children's products. Tests on other lunchboxes so far have elicited levels of lead between two and 25 times that same lead paint limit.

The lining of the lunchboxes has been where some of the highest lead levels were found, which is disturbing since that is where the food is most likely to have direct contact with the lunchbox. Lead is known to be harmful to children even in minute amounts, as it can impair brain

development and cause other behavioral and developmental problems. As CEH points out, the levels found in the lunchboxes aren't high enough by themselves to cause acute lead poisoning during normal use. However, since lead accumulates in the body, experts agree that all lead exposures should be minimized. CEH is concerned about lead in lunchboxes, and so are we, because there are many sources of lead in the world. Many children come into contact with multiple sources of lead in their daily lives, including sources most parents would never think could be a problem.


Despite the CEH testing, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has failed to take any action. It is important to eliminate all controllable sources of lead exposure, including lunchboxes, to ensure the health and well-being of our families, and the CPSC can help with that.

You can also find more data, a sample letter and other information that help you take action at www.generationgreen.org/actionalert_11-2005.htm. For even more information, visit CEH's Web site at www.cehca.org. 

FDA Bans Poultry Antibiotic

It's a promising sign that the recently confirmed U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner, Lester Crawford, in late July issued a precedent-setting decision to withdraw approval for use of Cipro-like antibiotics in poultry (see the FDA decision at www.fda.gov/oc/antimicrobial/baytril.pdf). This action is the first time that FDA has ever withdrawn an agricultural antibiotic from the market because of concerns about antibiotic resistance affecting human health. The ban was proposed in October 2000, but took nearly five years to finalize because of numerous procedural delays created by Bayer Corp., the manufacturer of the drug, whose trade name is Baytril. Both Baytril and Cipro are members of the fluoroquinolone class of antibiotics.

"Whether Commissioner Crawford will continue to make such health-conscious decisions remains to be seen, but we at Generation Green wish to applaud this decision, as it's an issue we've been working on for quite some time," says Rochelle Davis, Generation Green's executive director. "Overuse or misuse of antibiotics in humans is known to give rise to drug-resistant diseases, so it only makes sense to limit use of such drugs in the livestock we eat."


Prior to the decision, FDA had shown that use of Baytril in poultry reduces the effectiveness of Cipro in treating *Campylobacter*, one of the most common causes of severe bacterial food poisoning. The most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that resistance to Cipro in *Campylobacter* in humans has risen to 21 percent as of 2002. When Cipro-like drugs were first approved for use in poultry in 1995, such resistance was negligible. 

SEPA Legislation

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Among other things, SEPA could:

- Halt students and staff from unknowingly being exposed to unnecessary pesticide use.
- Provide incentives for schools to use safer, more effective pest management practices.
- Allow parents, school nurses, and staff to find out what is being applied and take any necessary precautions.
- Help with the dissemination of existing manuals, guides, etc., on implementing safer practices.
- Decrease the amount schools would spend on pest management.

We will have an upcoming action alert this winter to drive support for the version of SEPA reintroduced by U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) as H.R. 110 and a similar bill to be introduced in the Senate by U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). You can learn more about pesticide issues and other important children's school health issues by visiting www.generationgreen.org/sos-main.htm. If you aren't already on our list to receive monthly action alerts and would like to be, please go to www.generationgreen.org/Get%20Updates.htm. 


Fresh Choices

Celebrate Squash

Unlike the much more tender summer squashes, winter squashes (all of which are members of the gourd family) are harvested at a mature stage, when their shells (and usually their seeds) have grown hard and—in most winter squashes—inedible. The protective shells allow winter squashes to have a much longer storage life than their summer counterparts. You can often keep them for three months at home if stored in a cool, dry place. Note that despite their name, winter squashes are no longer bound to a particular season. Today, the term simply refers to hard-shelled varieties that keep well (as compared to summer squashes, such as zucchini, which do not).



The hard outer shell of a winter squash also makes risks of pesticide contamination much less, though still, buy organic squash when you can. Because of the risk of pesticide and other chemical exposures, Generation Green wants people to be able to make more informed decisions along these lines for your 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*. Inside, you'll find all sorts of helpful information about various foods, their best seasons, the chances that they might contain pesticides, and more. *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. 

Macaroni in Butternut Squash Sauce

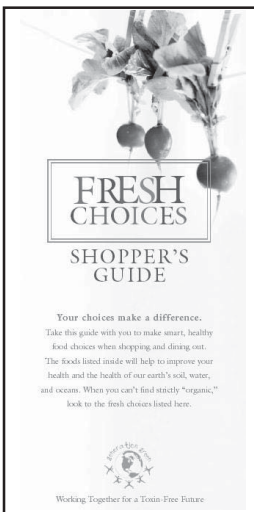
INGREDIENTS

- 12 ounces elbow macaroni, preferably whole-grain
- 1 small butternut squash, peeled, seeded and chopped (about 3 cups)
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast flakes
- 3 tablespoons light miso
- 2 tablespoons tahini (sesame paste)
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- ¼ teaspoon curry powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ cup to ¾ cup organic 2% milk or soymilk
- 2 tablespoons seasoned dry bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon organic butter, cut into small pieces (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Cook the macaroni in a pot of boiling salted water until just tender yet slightly firm in the center, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, place the squash in a steamer basket set over simmering water. Cover and steam until the squash is very soft, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a food processor. Add the yeast flakes, miso and tahini. Process until smooth. Add the mustard, curry powder, salt and pepper and blend again. Blend in enough milk to make a sauce that is the consistency of very thick soup.

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Drain the pasta and transfer to a large bowl. Pour the sauce over the top. Mix thoroughly and then scrape into a 1½-quart baking dish. Sprinkle evenly with the bread crumbs and with the butter pieces, if you are using them. Bake until the top is lightly browned, 15 to 20 minutes. For an extra-crunchy topping, run the casserole under the broiler for a minute or two. Makes six to eight servings.



Quick Recipe: Delicata Squash Chips

Cut the ends off the delicata squash and scoop out the seeds and pulp (no need to peel; this winter squash has an edible shell). Slice the squash into very thin slices to form ring-shaped rounds. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Coat slices lightly on both sides with oil and sprinkle with salt. Place in the oven and cook to desired doneness, whether golden and slightly chewy or crisp and brown. They are best served hot right out of the oven.



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.

School Environment Protection Act Is Long Overdue

Toxic pesticides are routinely used at schools across the nation. But while this practice is meant to reduce pests and protect children and staff from one set of threats, it also puts kids at increased risk of another threat, which is exposure to toxins.

Pesticides do have their uses, but should be used only when necessary, and sparingly. There are other means to control pests that can be used to reduce reliance on pesticides and in some case, eliminate their use, and we advocate for that through the Safeguard Our Students campaign.

Currently, more than 30 states have laws limiting pesticide use in and around schools. But the protections can vary widely from one place to another. Five of those states, for example, only legislate the posting of notification signs for outdoor lawn applications. That's hardly any protection at all. And then there are the 17 states with no protections at



all. (For more detailed information, visit www.generationgreen.org/sos-pesticide-states.htm.)

Children, particularly young children, are more vulnerable than adults to adverse health effects from pesticides.

Worse, pesticides are often used in areas of the school where exposure risks are heightened, such as in or near the cafeteria and on playgrounds and athletic fields.



A joint campaign with Organic Consumers Association

To make sure protections are consistent nationwide, we need federal legislation. Congress passed on the opportunity to pass the School Environment Protection Act (SEPA) last year, but it's back and it's time to get both the Senate and the House mobilized on this issue.

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