

THE greenREPORT



Spring 2003

Quicksilver Babies

Mercury's Tragic Course From Air to Fish to Mother to Child Needs to Stop

Many of our power plants are poisoning us, but not in the way you'd expect. No, it's not just toxic gases that we're breathing. It's mercury emissions that travel along air currents and then fall to the ground and water, where they are converted into methylmercury by bacteria.

Methylmercury, which is more toxic to humans than other forms of mercury because it is more easily absorbed in the body, travels through the food chain, often to fish that we eat. It can also pass from pregnant mother to developing fetus.

According to a report released in February by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), titled *America's Children and the Environment: Measures of Contaminants, Body Burdens, and Illnesses*, about 5 million women of childbearing age had at least 5.8 parts per billion (ppb) of mercury in their blood as of 2000. That's 8 percent of U.S. women aged 16 to 49.

A level of 5.8 ppb may not sound like much, but the EPA says children born to women with blood concentrations of mercury above 5.8 parts per billion are at risk of adverse health prob-



lems, including reduced developmental IQ, problems with motor skills, and damage to the cardiovascular, immune and reproductive systems.

To put it in perspective, those 5 million women represent one out every 57 people in the United States. It's not good for the health of America that so many potential mothers of millions of children are so at risk.

So, we are working with members like you, and with other organizations like the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN), to get some changes made in government to defuse this ticking "quicksilver time bomb."

Generation Green and CEHN are, in fact, urging a coordinated effort to curb the release of mercury into the environment, manage the storage and handling of such material, and increase public awareness and notification efforts regarding mercury in the environment (see article below, "Taking Action Against Mercury").



Taking Action Against Mercury

Efforts by Generation Green and the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN) to reduce exposure to mercury focus on three broad areas: reduction and prevention, storage and handling, and public right-to-know.

■ Reduction and Prevention

We must reduce mercury emissions from combustion sources, like coal-fired power plants and waste incinerators.

In this reduction/prevention effort, we oppose President Bush's recent "Clear Skies" proposal because it would raise allowable mercury emission levels to three times what could be achieved under the Clean Air Act. It could also unfairly burden poor communities with high levels of mercury. To find out more, visit www.generationgreen.org/actionalert_03-2003.htm.

Also, we need to substitute mercury-containing products with

non-mercury ones where possible, such as switching from mercury thermometers to digital thermometers. Most mercury-containing products can be replaced with safer alternatives.

U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, recently reintroduced legislation (S. 616) that would ban the sales of mercury thermometers without a prescription and create a program to more safely manage surplus mercury. This is a good start, and a bill that we will try to help finally turn into a law.

■ Storage and Handling

Mercury must be handled, stored and disposed of properly. As part of this, the EPA should develop better methods for disposal of products like dental amalgams for fillings, which contain mercury, and other sources of mercury as well.

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IPM Gains Ground at Schools Nationwide

A report released in mid-April by Beyond Pesticides and the School Pesticide Reform Coalition indicates a growing trend among schools to adopt safer pest management practices that dramatically reduce pesticide use, providing children with healthier learning environments.

Safer Schools: Achieving a Healthy Learning Environment Through Integrated Pest Management is said to be the first report of its kind to document the actual strategies schools



use to decrease pesticide use while implementing more effective pest management methods, such as integrated pest management (IPM). The report features descriptions of 27 school districts of all sizes from 19 states. It covers the whole range, from the three largest school districts in the continental United States

(New York City Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Chicago Public Schools) to individual schools like Lewis Cass Technical High School in Detroit, Michigan.

The authors of the report believe that its publication will help encourage schools, states and the federal government to adopt safer pest management programs. It could also help you get a handle on the issues so that you can make changes in your own schools and communities.

People often assume that schools are environmentally safe places for children, not realizing how many chemicals and

other toxins may be present--sometimes in places kids can directly ingest it, such as cafeterias. Schools that choose to adopt strategies like IPM use alternatives to the prevailing chemical-intensive practices so that they can reduce some of this toxic exposure. Pesticide exposure can adversely affect a child's neurological, respiratory, immune and endocrine systems and has been shown to cause or exacerbate asthma symptoms.

"Understanding how these programs take shape and the approaches used by schools and districts, as well as hurdles they had to overcome, is key to the broader adoption of successful programs across the nation," according to Kagan Owens, program director for the Washington-based information and advocacy group Beyond Pesticides.

Safer Schools also highlights how IPM significantly reduces and sometimes eliminates the use of pesticides, points out IPM's long-term cost effectiveness, and indicates how such practices can even yield better pest control results. In places where IPM practices are not used and where proper pesticide usage, storage and disposal don't exist, it's often up to us, the parents and other citizens, to make sure it happens. Where policies already exist, it's often up to us to make sure they are being implemented and enforced.

For assistance in working with your school district, contact Kagan Owens of Beyond Pesticides at (202) 543-5450 or kowens@beyondpesticides.org. For more information on pesticide exposure and IPM, visit www.beyondpesticides.org and www.generationgreen.org.

Mercury Action Plan (Continued from Page 1)

Some government agencies are already showing initiative. In a surprise move in April, an agency of the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) released an environmental report that analyzed three options for the 10 million pounds of U.S. government surplus mercury. The agency indicated its preferred option is storage rather than allowing the mercury to be sold. Although the recommendation has not yet been officially approved, much less adopted, it is a promising development. A long-term consolidated storage option is the most health-protective option for the public.

■ Right-to-Know

All facilities that use, handle or store mercury should keep nearby residents informed, whether the facilities are government locations, companies or schools.

The government can do a lot more to help this effort. For example, the country must undertake systematic monitoring of mercury in food such as fish and in people to protect us from consuming mercury-contaminated fish. Additionally, we

must monitor fetal mercury exposure by monitoring maternal levels, and we need to monitor highly exposed people, such as recreational fishers and their families.

Also, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) needs to adopt more stringent standards for levels of mercury allowed in foods like fish. Specifically, it needs to set the maximum allowable mercury level to child-protective standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

FDA's current allowable mercury levels are significantly higher than EPA's. Simply put, FDA is using the wrong standards and we will work to reverse that.

To find out more about mercury exposure, visit www.generationgreen.org/metals/overview.htm. To find out more about wise seafood choices with regard to mercury levels, visit www.generationgreen.org/fish/meats/overview.htm. To find out more about our mercury campaign with CEHN, visit www.generationgreen.org/cehn-main.htm.

Healthy Harvest

Fruits and vegetables are the staples of a healthy diet, right? Well, it's not always that simple. While an excellent source of vitamins and minerals, the health benefits of some fruits and vegetables are compromised by an alarming variety of pesticide residues. Organically grown produce can be a good solution, but is not always available or affordable.

In 1996 Congress passed the Food Quality Protection Act, which requires the EPA to reevaluate all pesticide residue levels to ensure that they are safe for children. Until these child-protective standards are implemented, we can protect our families by learning which fruits and vegetables have less pesticide residue and serving them in our family's meals.

Toward that end, Generation Green's executive director, Rochelle Davis, and David Joachim, an award-winning cookbook author, are writing a cookbook which will be published by Rodale Press in Spring 2004. The cookbook, *Fresh Choices*, will feature individuals who fight to protect children from unnecessary toxic exposure, along with their favorite recipes using the fruits and vegetables that have the least amount of pesticide residues.

Cooking Up a Better World

Nearly 150 supporters attended and greatly enjoyed the humor and social commentary of the comedy show, "Curious George Goes to War" as part of our fund-raising event held in



David Joachim and others on stage during Generation Green's fund-raiser at the Second City e.t.c. Theater.

March in Chicago. But it wasn't all about supporting environmental issues and enjoying some laughs. Thanks to David Joachim, as well as food sponsors Whole Foods Market, Organic Valley, Red Hen Bread, and Peterson and Sons Winery, guests also enjoyed a delicious, 80% organic meal made from scratch.

The Illinois Institute of Culinary Arts donated use of their kitchen, but the recipes were developed and cooking was supervised by Joachim, who has quite a food pedigree and

has been instrumental in the development of our *Fresh Choices* cookbook.

Joachim, who cooks and gardens in Pennsylvania with his wife and son, has written or edited more than 20 family-oriented cookbooks and health books. These include *Prevention* magazine's *The Healthy Cook* and *More Healthy Homestyle Cooking*. He is a former editor of *Vegetarian Gourmet* magazine and has appeared widely on national television and radio, including ABC, Fox, Food Network, Discovery Channel, QVC, and National Public Radio. He edited Steven Raichlen's *Healthy Latin Cooking*, which won a James Beard Award and was a finalist for a Julia Child Award. Below is one of the recipes he developed for our March fund-raiser, for tapenade phyllo tarts. Enjoy! 🍴

Tapenade Phyllo Tarts

- 1 cup pitted Kalamata olives
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 cup pine nuts
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme or ½ teaspoon dried
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cups fresh parsley leaves
- 3 boxes (2.1 ounces each) mini phyllo shells, thawed



Put all of the ingredients (except phyllo shells) in a food processor. Blend until the ingredients are finely chopped but not pureed into a paste, 15 to 30 seconds.

Refrigerate in a resealable bag for at least 4 hours or up to 24 hours. Bring to room temperature. Cut off a corner of the bag and pipe about 2 teaspoons of the filling into each of 45 phyllo shells.



Bake until heated through, 5 minutes.

Makes 45 mini tarts (about 2 cups filling).

To be notified when *Fresh Choices* is available for purchase, contact Rochelle Davis, executive director of Generation Green, by phone at (800) 652-0827 or by e-mail at rochelle@generationgreen.org.

Groundhog Lessons

How Groundhog's Garden Grew by Lynne Cherry imaginatively shows children the complicated process of planting a garden, making it understandable for kids and adults alike. It's also a tale of learning how to take care of oneself, and then being able to share with others. It all begins when Little Groundhog gets in trouble for eating out of a neighbor's garden. His friend Squirrel steps in to guide him, and the reader, through the process of finding seeds, cutting up potatoes, arranging plants for ideal sun exposure, and transplanting seedlings.

Author and illustrator Lynne Cherry has provided a feast for the eyes, with detailed drawings of seeds, species and plant varieties. It would be impossible for a child not learn something of importance, about everything from the complex interdependence of the natural world to the simple effectiveness of composting and going pesticide-free. 🌱

~Review by Mary Guthrie (For more recommended reading for kids and adults, visit us at www.generationgreen.org.)

Special Offer: Generation Green members can buy the book for \$7.98 plus \$3 for postage and handling. The book normally costs \$15.95. Send your request for a copy of the book and a check for \$10.98 payable to Generation Green to P.O. Box 7027, Evanston IL 60201.

Keeping USDA from "Zapping" Student Lunches

For the past few months, Generation Green members have sent thousands of letters to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) protesting plans to irradiate meat used in school lunch programs.



We are still awaiting a response from USDA Secretary Ann Veneman, but we are making progress on smaller scales in the meantime. For example, the Berkeley Unified School District in California recently banned irradiated food, as did the school board of Point Arena, California. To find out what you can do to be more aware and help ensure you know what your kids are eating, ask for a free copy of our *Safeguard Our Students Action Kit* by calling Mary Guthrie at (800) 652-0827, or e-mail her at mary@generationgreen.org. 🌱



CITIZEN ACTION NETWORK
P.O. Box 7027
Evanston, IL 60201

Call us at
1-800-652-0827

Write us at
P.O. Box 7027
Evanston, IL 60201

E-mail us at
info@generationgreen.org
www.generationgreen.org

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