

NGO MeHg Exposure Reduction Seminar Meeting Summary

Washington, DC

December 3, 2013

A seminar for over 20 public interest NGOs was held on Dec.3, 2013 at Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, D.C., organized by Dr. Ned Groth, III and Michael Bender of the Mercury Policy Project (reporting.) After introductions, Bender gave a brief overview of the health issues covered under the new Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Our overall goal, presented in our agenda, was to increase participation by public interest NGOs in, among other activities, three federal policy-making processes, ongoing or about to start—

- 1) the rollout of the updated FDA/EPA advisory on Hg & fish consumption,
- 2) the EPA's review and updating the reference dose (RfD) for mercury, and
- 3) the 2015 revision of the Dietary Guidelines by HHS and USDA, which the fish consumption advisory, under statute, must follow.

In his opening remarks, Dr.Groth explained that in addition to the three upcoming federal policy initiatives, there are many other ongoing activities related to methylmercury exposure issues that should at least be monitored and where appropriate, we should participate.

During the morning, we were updated on recent research.

1) *Recent Epidemiological Evidence and Evolving Perspectives on Benefits and Risks* by Ned Groth, PhD, Independent Consultant, who summarized epidemiological studies over the past decade (see also the report: http://www.zeromercury.org/phocadownload/Developments_at_UNEP_level/INC5/groth_report_zmwg%20rev.pdf)

2) *Potential benefits and harm of fish consumption* By Emily Oken, MD, MPH, Department of Population Medicine, Harvard Medical School; focus on nutrition. Fish is the primary dietary source of omega fatty acids; necessary for optimal fetal brain, eye development (DHA)— Most women eat too little. Upshot-how to promote the benefits of fish consumption while minimizing risks of mercury.

3) *Recent Advances in Databases on Mercury in Fish* by Tim Fitzgerald, PhD, Environmental Defense Fund; EDF Hg database comprises 350 gov't & peer reviewed sources of datasets from multiple federal agencies (EPA, FDA, NOAA), multiple state agencies (e.g., VA, AK, DE) and various sources from the scientific literature. (Add link to his ppt)

The presenters then answered audience questions until the lunch break.

The afternoon session began with an overview of pending federal policy activities and included presentations by federal agency officials.

1) *Quantitative Modeling of Benefits and Risks and Implications for Risk Management for Mercury Exposure from Commercially-Caught Fish* by Philip Spiller, Senior Advisor, FDA/CFSAN; Presented the underlying rationale for updating the FDA-EPA fish consumption advisory; strong focus on maximizing net benefits and will address numerous (50+) species rather than the handful of species mentioned in the 2004 advisory, which is based on outdated science from the 1990s. The advisory is “on track” for publication but the next major hurdle it faces is review by OMB.

2) *Review and Update of the Reference Doses for inorganic Hg and methylmercury* by Samantha Jones, PhD, Associate Director for Science, IRIS Program, US EPA. Provided a detailed description of the EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Process, with emphasis on opportunities for stakeholder engagement, and timing of assessments.

3) *Update of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015* by Stephanie Goodwin, PhD, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, US DHHS. Described the process, already under way, which involves extensive work by several appointed expert advisory committees; and focused on opportunities for stakeholder input.

Following a Q&A session and a brief break, we then discussed strategies for participation in policy processes. We agreed that:

- Today's presentations will be posted on the MPP web site
- We will work collaboratively to address the upcoming federal policy initiatives and certain other related activities
- We brainstormed, and came up with about a dozen ideas for ways we can work together and particular actions that would be useful. Ned will write this up an "Action Plan" including where possible target timelines and people willing to do the tasks, and circulate it to the group.