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New Report Shows Need for Strong FDA Advice on Mercury in Fish Twenty-Three People with Mercury Poisoning Share Their Stories

WASHINGTON, Dec. 15 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Real people have been sickened by mercury in fish according to a new report released today, demonstrating the importance of strong FDA advice on mercury in fish. The new report, *Over the Limit*, shares stories like those of Dan Deeter, Will Smith, and Wendy Moro, who each ate enough store-bought fish to suffer mercury's effects according to their physicians. From New Jersey to Wisconsin to California, these stories show that seafood contamination is a very real problem that should not be ignored.

"We've known for years that mercury is toxic to the brain and other organs in varying amounts depending on the individual's status. For FDA to suddenly change the equation to say that benefits outweigh risks is like once again declaring the earth is flat after discovering it was round," concluded Jane M. Hightower, M.D., an internal medicine physician in San Francisco, CA, who published a landmark study that brought the issue of mercury in seafood to national attention. "Simply stated, FDA's proposed recommendation to eat more fish is likely based on flawed science."

In 2004, the FDA joined the EPA in releasing advice to restrict the species and amounts of fish eaten by pregnant women and children due to exposure risks to mercury. On Friday, in a draft report submitted to the White House, the FDA proposed to not only rescind that advice, but recommend that sensitive populations eat more mercury-contaminated fish.

"Talk about getting hooked on fish stories," said Michael Bender, Director of the Mercury Policy Project, which produced the report. "FDA has really gone overboard this time by casting out the science and reeling in the industry 'line' instead," Bender said, referring to an industry report released prior to the FDA report that reached strikingly similar conclusions.

Exposure and toxic effects in adults and children are well-documented. Dr. Hightower's new book, *Diagnosis: Mercury: Money, Politics and Poison*, catalogues her patients' mercury poisoning case histories.

"Patients in my private medical practice, as well as at other doctor's offices around the country, have been diagnosed with mercury toxicity from eating too much fish. Ignoring the presence of a known neurotoxin in one's diet is simply asking for trouble," said Dr. Hightower.

"To say there's nothing to worry about simply ignores reality," said Stephanie Simmons. "My daughter's reactions to additional mercury in her system from one meal of fish are

testimony to that. Before being diagnosed and treated, her symptoms were dramatic, but now, subtler and longer-lasting after-effects still remain."

Simmons's story about her daughter is not an isolated case. Diagnosis of low-dose mercury poisoning from fish consumption is challenging unless physicians know what to look for and order the tests to confirm the diagnosis.

"You can get the benefits without the risks simply by choosing low mercury fish," said Jackie Savitz, senior campaign director for Oceana. "To avoid mercury-related illnesses, consumers need to see the FDA advice in stores where they buy seafood – FDA shouldn't weaken it just when it's starting to show some benefits" she added.

The Mercury Policy Project Report [Over the Limit](#) is available at www.oceana.org/mercury.

More information:

Dr. Jane Hightower's book, *Diagnosis: Mercury: Money, Politics and Poison* at: www.Diagnosismercury.org

Mercury Policy Project's new report, "Over the Limit," on patient histories related to mercury poisoning, at: www.mercurypolicy.org

Access the draft FDA report, EPA's response and related information at: www.ewg.org/node/27431

Calculator for personal use to estimate one's mercury body-burden at: www.GotMercury.org

Joint FDA/EPA fish consumption advice at: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3.html