

## **Regional actions urged to track mercury's entry into the Great Lakes**

Ann Arbor, Mich. – New actions are needed to better understand how mercury enters the Great Lakes and what can be done to eliminate the health risks posed by this pollutant. That's the main recommendation of a report released today by the Great Lakes Commission, an Ann Arbor, Mich.-based agency established by the Great Lakes states to address regional issues.

The report promotes further efforts to monitor mercury in the atmosphere and in rainfall and snowfall to determine how this contaminant enters the region's lakes and rivers. Recommendations include increasing research on how mercury moves from the atmosphere into fish and whether efforts to cut mercury air emissions will be sufficient to reduce levels in fish to safe amounts.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) estimates that as many as several hundred thousand children are born in the United States each year at risk of neurological defects due to prenatal exposure to mercury. Mothers are believed to receive the majority of their mercury exposure through eating both commercial and sport-caught fish.

Mercury enters the Great Lakes and other rivers and lakes in the region primarily from the atmosphere. Coal combustion is the primary source of mercury air emissions in the Great Lakes region and nationally. The U.S. federal government and many state governments recently enacted rules and regulations aimed at severely limiting the mercury emissions from this source, but additional monitoring is needed to identify whether these regulations are successful in protecting human health and the environment. The report also recommends a variety of actions to determine changes in total mercury deposition over time and connect these changes to specific sources.

While mercury levels in water are easily measured, the processes by which mercury accumulates in fish are not fully understood. More work is needed to quantify how much of a reduction in mercury emissions is needed to protect to human and wildlife health. The report also recommends steps to better understand how mercury moves from the atmosphere to watersheds and water bodies, how mercury gets converted to the form – methylmercury – that accumulates in fish, and how methylmercury moves through the food chain to affect people and wildlife that consume fish.

The report was prepared with the help of Great Lakes state environmental protection agencies and input from other experts within the region. It offers specific recommendations on how existing efforts can be expanded and improved upon to produce the information needed to track mercury pollution across the region. It also calls for national leadership to promote large-scale monitoring and analysis of mercury contamination across the country. Bills have been introduced in both the U.S. Senate (S. 843) and House of Representatives (H.R. 1553) to create national mercury monitoring network that would support many of the recommendations in the report.

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