

For Immediate Release

Contact: Michael Bender, 802-223-9000

## FDA Should Ban High Mercury Tuna from U.S. Market, As Canada Requires

Washington, DC—Following reports that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) will not allow sales of high mercury canned tuna into the Canadian market, a mercury watchdog group is calling on the U.S. Food & Drug Administration to do the same.

“FDA’s own testing indicates that some albacore canned tuna has very high mercury levels comparable to those found in Canada,” said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project. “However, the agency has done nothing to prevent high mercury tuna from ending up in our children’s sandwiches or our dinner plates.”

A recent national news report in Canada indicated that 8 out of 60 cans of albacore tuna exceeded the Government of Canada's guidelines of 0.5 parts per million for mercury. In a follow up review, CFIA determined that 5 of the 60 cans tested (8%) exceeded the standard of 0.5ppm.

In response, the CFIA has contacted tuna importers to ensure that incoming shipments of canned albacore tuna are tested. CFIA is also reminding governments of the top exporting countries, including the U.S., and domestic Canadian importers of the importance of meeting Canadian requirements.

How much fish a person can eat before exceeding the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) "virtual safe limit," called a reference dose (RfD), depends on body weight and mercury content of the fish. For example:

- A 22 pound toddler eating only 2 ounces of tuna per week with a 0.5 ppm mercury concentration would have an intake over 4 times the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Reference Dose.
- If a woman with a typical weight of 132 lbs eats 12 ounces of canned tuna per week with a 0.5 ppm mercury concentration, she will exceed by 4 times the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Reference Dose.
- An 88 pound child consuming one 6 ounce can of tuna with a 0.5 ppm mercury concentration weekly would be exposed to 3 times the EPA's RfD standard.

“According to recent testing, some light canned tuna also has high mercury levels that surpass 0.5 ppm mercury,” said Bender. “Unfortunately, FDA has not followed up on this either.”

Like lead, mercury is a potent neurotoxin that especially threatens the brains and nervous systems of fetuses and young children. People are exposed to mercury largely through eating certain fish.

Those most at risk from methylmercury-contaminated food are babies and small children. The brains of babies in the uterus are the most vulnerable. The greatest risk is to young women, before or during pregnancy, eating fish containing high levels of methylmercury (eg shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and some types of tuna).

Coal-fired power plants, cement kilns, waste incinerators and other industrial sources emit mercury into the environment.

On February 19, 2007, Health Canada issued new advice for pregnant women and children to limit consumption of canned albacore tuna.

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For more information:

<http://www.news.gc.ca/cfmx/view/en/index.jsp?articleid=281379>

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/seamehg2.html>

<http://www.defenders.org/tunamercury/report.html>

<http://www.mercurypolicy.org/new/documents/CanTheTuna061903.pdf>