

Going Green in Londonderry

Keep Yourself Safe from Mercury

As mentioned in our Letter to the Editor, mercury is harmful to both human health and wildlife. Where does it come from? There are natural sources—volcanoes, erosion, forest fires—and manmade ones. The latter include burning of municipal and medical wastes as well as fossil fuels, especially coal.

The highest levels of mercury are found in the northeastern states. Prevailing winds from Midwestern power plants contribute about a quarter of the mercury that's in our region. When it rains, mercury in the air enters our lakes and streams and contaminates the fish stock. Levels found in yellow perch, pickerel and bass exceed the EPA reference dose in NH and all nearby states.

Wildlife including loons, eagles, otter, mink, herons and snapping turtles are exposed to mercury when they consume fish, harming their reproduction. In plants mercury decreases chlorophyll production, inhibiting growth and damaging leaves.

Mercury can be found in many common household and industrial products: automotive and washing machine switches, thermostats, thermometers, light bulbs, medical devices, toys & games, even sneakers and vaccines. But efforts have been underway since the late 1990s to reduce our use of mercury.

NH law now prohibits the sale of most mercury-added products, although fluorescent lamps, button batteries and some formulated compounds are exempt. Nevertheless, none of the exempted items are allowed in our landfills, incinerators or transfer stations. Happily, you now have convenient ways to recycle them in town.

Safe consumption levels

Despite being important to healthy diets, most fish / shellfish have traces of mercury. Here are consumption guidelines from NH Dept. of Environmental Services:

- Freshwater stocked trout – women of childbearing age and children under 7 can safely eat 1 meal per week; all others can eat up to 6 meals per week.
- Other freshwater fish – adults and children 7 and older can eat 4 8-oz. meals per month, while pregnant/nursing women and young children should limit themselves to 1 8-oz. and 1 4-oz. meal monthly, respectively.
- Most saltwater fish– pregnant/nursing women and children should limit themselves to 2 meals weekly, or 1 meal for halibut, red snapper, tuna steak and white tuna. No limit for other people.
- Swordfish, shark and king mackerel - pregnant /nursing women and children should avoid these, and others should limit to 2 meals per month.

For more information, go to: www.des.nh.gov.

~ Courtesy of Londonderry's Solid Waste and Environment Committee and NH DES ~