

Mercury In The Environment

(NAPSA)—Since the late 18th century, people have found many uses for mercury—including light bulbs, pesticides, batteries, paint, thermometers and barometers.

During the 1950s and 1960s, two major international poisoning episodes resulted from the long-term consumption of high levels of methyl mercury in fish.

The associated health risks prompted the passage of laws limiting mercury exposure in the U.S.

There is little doubt that mercury can cause toxic effects, but scientists say it is a matter of dosage.

According to The Annapolis Center for Science-Based Public Policy, which recently released a White Paper on mercury, 3,000 tons are emitted annually by human activities, but only 144 tons are generated in the U.S. environment.

Asia accounts for nearly half of mercury emissions globally and China's coal-fired power plants alone represent approximately 22 percent of these. U.S. coal-fired electrical utilities, the largest source of human-related mercury emissions in this country, contribute less than one percent globally.

There is no way to know how much of the mercury found in fish is the result of atmospheric emissions of mercury from electric utility plants or of any other man-made source.

Since mercury can travel great distances, and since much of the mercury deposited in U.S. waters comes from outside U.S. borders, any attempts to reduce mercury loads in water or in fish would require actions on a global scale rather than a local or regional scale.