

IPEN Statement on Mercury in the Hair of INC1 Delegates

Joe DiGangi, IPEN

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Thank you.

An example of NGO involvement in public awareness-raising on mercury happened this week during the meeting. IPEN and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation performed a survey of mercury in the hair of delegates at this meeting. I would like to briefly present the results of this survey.

Since INC1 is a global meeting with participants from all over the world, we thought it would be interesting to survey delegates from all UN regions for mercury content in hair to raise awareness and illustrate the global nature of mercury contamination in humans. Hair is used as a way to estimate the body's methylmercury content, and establishes a link between fish consumption and hair mercury content.

45 government delegates and 8 representatives of NGOs and Indigenous Peoples gave samples. In total there were participants from 40 countries. The identities of these participants are confidential unless they would like to comment on their own results.

In addition, 4 Swedish members of Swedish parliamentary parties- Andreas Carlgren (Minister of Environment, the Center Party), Göran Hågglund (Social Minister Party Leader, Christian Democrats), Mona Sahlin (Party Leader, Social Democrats), Maria Wetterstrand (Party Leader, The Greens)- and 1 Swedish Olympic Game Gold Winner, Anja Pärson, gave samples.

The limitations of the survey included the relatively small sample size and self-selection of participants. In addition, since participation was voluntary, no effort was made to control for age or gender or to obtain similar sample sizes from each UN region. Despite these shortcomings, this brief survey revealed some interesting information about mercury body burden.

There were four very interesting results of this study:

- 1) We found mercury in every sample we tested at levels above background;
- 2) To test the hypothesis that delegates might differ in their human body burden of mercury, the data was separated into two groups; participants from developed countries and those from developing countries and CEIT. Interestingly, a statistical analysis of the data shows that average mercury levels in hair of participants from developing countries and CEIT was approximately twice as high

as levels found in participants from developed countries; 669 ug/kg and 1182 ug/kg;

- 3) 38% of the samples exceeded the US National Research Council mercury reference dose of 1000 ug/kg; (level for pregnant women to avoid adverse fetal brain development effects);

- 4) Of the samples that exceeded this reference dose, 81% were from developing and transition countries.

This survey could not identify the reasons for the higher levels in our sample; however, this audience is quite familiar with deliberate uses and unintentional sources of mercury.

The reactions to this survey have been interesting.

Minister Carlgren, who opened this meeting on Monday, said that the survey illustrates the need to tackle the mercury problem, because mercury is present in all of us and it shouldn't be a part of our bodies!. The ongoing negotiations are our chance to make a real difference for coming generations.

For us, this brief survey illustrates the urgent need to eliminate all human sources of mercury.

IPEN would like to expand this type of activity to the 100 countries that contain NGOs participating in the Network..

Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues at SSNC and the Department of Applied Environmental Science (ITM), Stockholm University

Thank you very much.