

CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION PREVENTING HUMAN MERCURY EXPOSURE (2000)

CMA passed a resolution this year authored by SF Bay Area PSR Chapter President Dr. Robert Gould Resolution 115-00

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Whereas, mercury is a component of consumer and medical products which, when discarded, become a fuel for waste incinerators, ultimately accounting for approximately 30% of the 158 tons of human-generated mercury emissions released to the air annually in the U.S.;¹ and,

Whereas, it is understood that when inorganic mercury is released into the environment, microbial biotransformation produces methylmercury, especially in aquatic environments, and that this organic compound accumulates as one moves up the food chain;² and,

Whereas, methylmercury is known to adversely affect the nervous and reproductive systems of humans, with particular danger posed to the developing brain, manifested by neuro-developmental deficits such as cerebral palsy and mental retardation, as well as developmental delays such as delayed walking and speech, and other disabilities that may be latent in infancy, and which may appear only later in childhood;³ and,

Whereas, avoiding incineration of mercury-containing wastes and adopting mercury-free product alternatives is fundamental to a primary prevention approach that reduces human and wildlife exposure to mercury; and,

Whereas, it is known that appropriate alternative mercury-free products are currently available for many mercury-containing consumer and healthcare products;⁴ and,

Whereas, the American Hospital Association has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the EPA to phase out mercury-contaminated waste in hospitals by the year 2005, while highly-effective programs for the virtual elimination of mercury from hospital waste through use of mercury-free alternative products have been initiated in the U.S.;⁵ therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the California Medical Association encourages the reduced use of mercury-containing products by urging medical product suppliers to continue to develop, produce, and bring to market appropriate, cost-competitive, environmentally protective, and effective mercury-free replacements; and, be it further

RESOLVED: That the CMA calls upon health care professionals to encourage the institutions with which they are associated to adopt policies that will lead toward the

eventual elimination of mercury containing products where feasible, effective alternatives are available, and to promptly eliminate mercury from the waste-stream fed into incinerators.

REFERENCES

1. US Environmental Protection Agency. Mercury Study: Report to Congress, Vol II, An Inventory of Anthropogenic Mercury Emissions in the United States, Washington DC: US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Air Quality Planning Standards and Office of Research and Development; 1997. EPA/452/R-97-004; Northeast States and Eastern Canadian Provinces. Mercury Study: A Framework for Action, 1998.
2. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Mercury Fact Sheet, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, September 1995.
3. US Environmental Protection Agency. Mercury Study: Report to Congress, Vol VII, Characterization of Human Health and Wildlife Risks from Mercury Exposure in the United States, Washington DC: US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Air Quality Planning Standards and Office of Research and Development; 1997. EPA/452/R-97-009; Watanabe C, Satoh H. Evolution of Our Understanding of Methylmercury as a Health Threat. *Environ Health Perspect.* 1996, 104(Suppl 2): 367-379; Weiss B, Reuhl K. Delayed Neurotoxicity: A Silent Toxicity in *Principles of Neurotoxicology*, Louis W. Chang, ed. Marcel Dekker, New York: publisher, 1994.
4. Michigan Mercury Pollution Prevention Task Force. Mercury Pollution Prevention in Michigan, 1996; National Wildlife Federation. Mercury Pollution Prevention in Healthcare: A Prescription for Success, 1997
5. American Hospital Association: Memorandum of Understanding between the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the American Hospital Association, June 24, 1998; Environmental Working Group and Healthcare Without Harm. *Greening Hospitals: An Analysis of Pollution Prevention in America's Top Hospitals*, 1998.