Protecting Health Through Information: The FDA/EPA Federal Advisory on Methylmercury in Fish

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Overview

Information is a tool
Targeted communication can change knowledge, attitudes, and behavior
Effective information exchange can lead people toward making informed decisions to reduce their potential risk

Mercury Health Effects

Highly toxic and biomagnifies

- Impaired neurological development (low doses)
 - Neurotoxic effects, especially in children who were exposed *in utero*, are well documented
- Impacts on cognitive functions
- Other health effects (high doses)

NHANES 2002 data

 – 5.7% US women of childbearing age have mercury in blood above reference dose level

Regulations + Communication = Increased Public Protection

Clean Water Act

 Water Quality Criterion for the Protection of Human Health-Methylmercury

Clean Air Act

- Clean Air Mercury Rule
- Clean Air Interstate Rule
- Implementing EPA's Mercury Roadmap
 Building on Voluntary Partnerships
 Pollution Prevention
 Information for informed risk management decisions

EPA's National Fish Advisory Program

- Technical assistance to state, federal and tribal agencies on health risks from contaminants in fish and wildlife
 - National guidance documents and outreach
 - National databases
 - Assistance in issuing advisories
 - National conferences and workshops
 - Grants for sampling and analysis
 - Conduct special studies
 - Issue advisories when needed

Fish Consumption Advisories

- A voluntary recommendation providing advice on which and how much fish can be safely consumed
- Can be targeted to specific waters or geographic areas
- Can be national in scope
- Typically issued by states after sampling fish from specific waters
- National Joint EPA/FDA Advice on Mercury in Fish

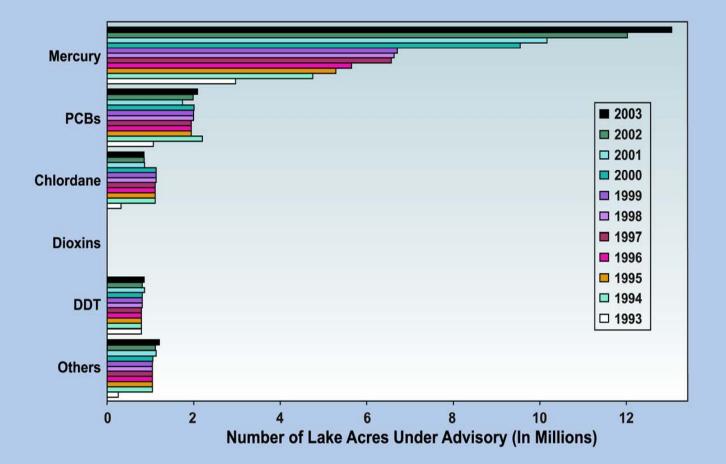
Basic Logic behind Fish Advisories

"Provide the general public with necessary information/knowledge about which fish are potentially contaminated to enable safer choices"

State and Federal Roles in Issuing Fish Advisories

- States and Tribes have primary responsibility for recreational and subsistence fish harvested from their waters
- FDA is primarily responsible for issuing advice on commercial fish
- EPA issues advice as a stopgap measure for untested waters

Number of U.S. Lake Acres Under Advisory



2004 FDA/EPA Joint National Mercury Fish Advisory

- In 2003, EPA and FDA met w/ FDA's Food Advisory Committee (FAC)
 - To ensure that advice provided adequate protection for pregnant women and women of childbearing age
 - FDA and EPA met with broad stakeholder groups to refine and tailor advice
 - Draft Advisory developed based on comments from all stakeholders
 - Focus Group tested Advisory

The Basic Message

Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel or Tilefish
Eat up to 12 ounces (2 avg. meals) a week of fish/shellfish low in mercury
Check local advisories about safety of fish caught locally

Outreach Program

National Press Conference
Calls with Stakeholder Groups
National Outreach Campaign

Outreach Products for Diverse Audiences

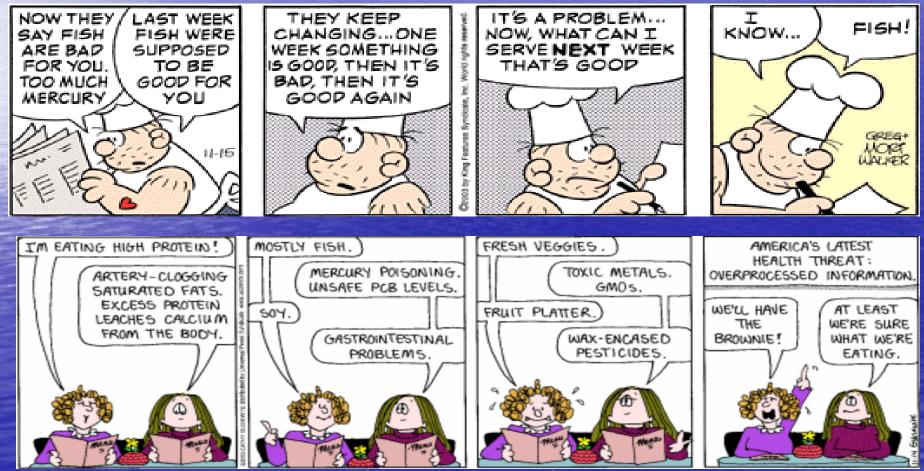
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Conflicting Messages



Conflicting Messages

• U.S. Tuna Foundation

Fishcam

Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies

Washington Post

Measuring Success

- The National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey (NHANES)
 - Assessment of health and nutritional status of adults and children in the U.S.
 - By 2011, NHANES data would show:
 - reduction in % of women of childbearing age with mercury blood levels at level of concern
 - no decrease in consumption of fish and shellfish by women of childbearing age

Measuring Success

Infant Feeding Practices Study

 Designed by EPA/FDA to assess level of awareness of mercury as a problem
 Association of mercury with seafood
 Changes in seafood consumption
 Consumer sources of diet info. during pregnancy

Measuring Success

FDA Consumer Food Safety Survey

 Awareness of health benefits/concerns from eating seafood
 Knowledge of problematic seafood
 Awareness of mercury in seafood
 Knowledge of subgroups advised to limit seafood consumption

Next Steps

Continue implementing the FDA/EPA Joint National Advisory Outreach Campaign Continue working with stakeholder groups to reduce public confusion resulting from conflicting messaging Continue strengthening the science foundation for public advice on mercury