

Memorandum of Meeting

Date: December 6, 2000

Place: Conference Call

Participants:

Canada

- Ross Thompson, Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)
- Glenn McGregor, CFIA
- Cameron Prince, CFIA
- John Salminen, Health Canada
- Bruce Lauer, Health Canada

FDA

- Joseph Levitt, Director, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, HFS-1
- Philip Spiller, Director, Office of Seafood, HFS-400
- Michael Bolger, Director, Division of Risk Assessment, Office of Plant and Dairy Foods and Beverages
- Tamar Nordenberg, Editor/Writer, Food Safety Initiative, HFS-32

Subject: Methylmercury in Commercial Seafood

Mr. Levitt opened the meeting by explaining that FDA had met with various groups to seek their perspectives on the issue of methylmercury in commercial seafood, and that the agency was interested in hearing how the Canadian health organizations have addressed the issue.

The Canadian representatives stated that their country's advice on methylmercury in fish is in many ways similar to FDA's existing advisory, but that Canada's advisory applies to fresh and frozen tuna (but not canned tuna) as well as shark and swordfish, and to children as well as women of childbearing age. Canada's advice to the general population is to restrict consumption of swordfish, shark, and fresh and frozen tuna to one meal per week. For young children and women of childbearing age, they advise restricting consumption of these species to one meal per month. Other species not included in the advisory are monitored by the CFIA and are subject to a 0.5 parts per million (ppm) level.

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In response to a question from FDA as to why children were included as a sensitive population, a Canadian representative replied that it was a precautionary measure, not based on specific data in children.

As to how Canadian authorities disseminated the message regarding methylmercury in fish, Canadian representatives stated that the message was publicized through the media. Also, authorities included the information in a guide they developed on nutrition for a healthy pregnancy and on CFIA's Web site.

Canadian representatives next explained how their country's authorities decided what information to include in the advisory: They used a weight-of-evidence approach, considering all available studies' strengths and weaknesses, including the existence of PCBs and other complicating factors. Canadian authorities will review the new Seychelles data carefully when it comes out, representatives said.

Canadian representatives said their country saw no marked drop in canned tuna consumption after the advisory came out. Authorities did get some inquiries about canned tuna that called for a clarification that the advisory did not apply to canned tuna. Canadian representatives said they currently see no problem with methylmercury in canned tuna that would call for an extension of the advisory to this type of fish.

Mr. Levitt closed the meeting by telling the Canadian experts that FDA would be deciding soon whether to change the advisory and if so, to what, and thanking them for sharing their country's approach.

  
Louis J. Carson