

Mercury in Maine lakes

It's a sobering fact that mercury levels in Maine fish, loons, and eagles are among the highest in North America, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection. That's why DEP considers mercury "a significant health threat to humans and wildlife."

Mercury is a naturally occurring heavy metal that binds easily with other metals and conducts electricity well. So it's been used in many household, medical and industrial products.

The primary source of mercury in the environment is human activities, such as emissions from coal-burning power plants and waste incinerators. Mercury then enters lakes, streams and rivers through precipitation and improper disposal of household products.

When released into the environment it can change to methylmercury, a highly toxic compound. And since mercury doesn't break down in the environment, it's there to stay.

Methylmercury is easily taken up in living tissue and builds up over time, causing serious health effects such as neurological and reproductive disorders in people and wildlife. When ingested, it can cause weight loss, reproductive problems and early death. In humans, it slows development and impairs brain function. It can cause tremors, numbness, loss of muscle control, memory loss and kidney disease.

Currently 40 states, including Maine, have fish consumption advisories due to mercury contamination. The Maine Bureau of Health has recommends that pregnant women, women of childbearing age, and young children statewide limit their fish consumption.



Fish consumption advisory

The limit for brook trout and landlocked salmon: **ONE MEAL PER MONTH** for pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under eight. **ONE MEAL PER WEEK** for all others.

The limit for all other fish species: **NO MEALS** for pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under eight. **TWO MEALS PER MONTH** for all others.

For information on products that contain mercury and how to recycle them call the Maine Department of Environmental Protection at 800-452-1942 or visit www.maine.gov/dep/mercury/.

For spills call the DEP at 800-452-4664. If human contact occurs call 800-442-6305.