



Mercury Policy Project

**For Immediate Release: For More Information
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**INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE SEAFOOD STUDY
MISSES THE BOAT ON PROVIDING POINT
OF SALE CONSUMER ADVICE AND
PROTECTING KIDS FROM MERCURY, SAY
PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS**

Washington, D.C. – Public interest groups panned the report released today by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) for failing to achieve its goal of providing tools to help inform consumers about seafood’s health benefits and risks, and failing to adequately protect children from exposure to mercury. The report was

commissioned by the National Marine Fisheries Service, and titled *Seafood Choices, Balancing Benefits and Risks*.

Oceana, Mercury Policy Project, Center for Science in the Public Interest and Natural Resources Defense Council argued that if the IOM or the Commerce Department really wanted to help inform consumers about the Food and Drug Administration and Environmental Protection Agency (FDA/EPA) advice, they could have simply looked to the grocery industry. Four major companies (Safeway, Wild Oats, Whole Foods and Trader Joe's), making up nearly 10% of the grocery market-share, are posting FDA/EPA advice at their seafood counters, empowering consumers to make informed choices, to get the benefits of seafood while avoiding the risks.

“The report neglects to include a common sense recommendation already being carried out by major grocery companies to help consumers make sensible choices,” said Jackie Savitz, Director of Oceana’s Campaign to Stop Seafood Contamination. “Worse yet, the report attempts to undermine government advice by downplaying the mercury risks, especially with regard to children and America’s number one most heavily consumed fish: tuna.”

An EPA scientist has estimated that hundreds of thousands of American women already have mercury levels high enough to pose a neurological risk to a developing fetus because most people ingest mercury solely from eating fish. However, the benefits of fish can be enjoyed and the risks avoided, simply by choosing low mercury fish.

“If they really wanted to help high-risk consumers and bring others back to the fish counter, the panel would have supported information on mercury in stores, like the ones already being posted by many companies,” said Caroline Smith-DeWaal of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. “Labeling, both through notices at the seafood counter and directly on packages of fish, would take away the confusion at the fish counter.”

While the IOM endorsed the FDA/EPA advice to pregnant women to limit or not eat certain fish, it did not follow FDA's recommendations regarding smaller servings for children. "The problem with the IOM recommendation for children is that it is based on the same portion size as adults rather than being adjusted for body weight," said Michael Bender, Director of the Mercury Policy Project. "Kids are not only smaller, but they are developmentally vulnerable, so for the IOM to make the same recommendations for kids as for adult women is irresponsible."

"The bottom line is that this report complicates the issue, rather than clearing anything up in an apparent attempt to send the message that tuna is safer to eat than FDA suggests," said Jennifer Sass, Senior Scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "For a panel like this to attempt to undermine full-time scientists' and government agencies' advice is simply irresponsible."

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For more information:

<http://www.oceana.org/mercury>

<http://iom.edu/CMS/3788/23788.aspx>

<http://www.mercurypolicy.org/new/documents/20050201LettertoIOMPanelonSeafoodRisks.pdf>

<http://www.cspinet.org/new/200607061.html>

<http://www.nrdc.org/health/effects/mercury/index.asp>