

### **National Mercury Thermometer Ban Bill Rises Out of U.S. Senate Environment Committee**

Senators Collins, Jeffords praised for leadership in protecting Americans from mercury contamination-and addressing the surplus mercury issue

WASHINGTON, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, Jun. 27 -/E-Wire/-- Health and environmental groups praised members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee for supporting S.351, a bill to phase out mercury thermometers and improve management of surplus mercury. The bill, introduced by Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), with a substitute amendment by Senators Smith (R-NH), Voinovich (R-OH) and Jeffords (I-VT), unanimously passed the Committee today.

"Thermometers contain about one gram of mercury, which is enough to contaminate a 20-acre lake, and thereby require fish advisories," said Michael Bender, Director of the Mercury Policy Project. "While ten states have banned mercury thermometer sales, we need a comprehensive national-and global-strategy to eliminate all mercury uses and keep surplus quantities out of commerce. We thank Senator Jeffords for his leadership."

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one-in-ten women of childbearing age have mercury levels in their bodies above what is considered protective for the developing fetus. Presently, 41 states have fish consumption advisories for mercury and ten states-Maine, Oregon, Indiana, California, New Hampshire, Maryland, Connecticut, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island-have banned the sale of mercury fever thermometers. In addition, 11 of the top 15 national retailers have stopped selling mercury fever thermometers.

"We applaud Maine's Senator Susan Collins for taking action to protect the public health and environment from mercury," said Charlotte Brody, RN, Executive Director of Health Care Without Harm.

The bill prohibits sale of mercury fever thermometers, except by prescription, within 180 days of enactment and also authorizes EPA to spend \$20 million to implement a national mercury thermometer collection and exchange program. S.351 also directs EPA to keep the mercury collected from thermometers out of commerce, creates a Federal task force to make recommendations regarding the long-term management of surplus mercury and authorizes EPA to spend \$1 million per year to properly manage surplus mercury.

"Phasing out mercury-containing thermometers is a necessary step to help reduce mercury pollution to our environment," said Pete Didisheim of the Natural Resources Council of Maine. "More importantly, we need leadership from the federal government in taking care of the hundreds of tons of surplus mercury that will be retired from obsolete manufacturing processes over the next decade. This bill could help provide that federal leadership on mercury stockpiles."

Presently, no mercury thermometers are made anywhere in the U.S.--the primary mercury thermometer factories are in India and China. Non-mercury thermometers are readily available and have proven to be just as accurate as mercury thermometers. The bill does not apply to basal, industrial, or any other type of thermometer or mercury products.

"The bipartisan support demonstrated for S.351 is the kind of support we need to reduce mercury pollution from all sources, in order to fully protect people and wildlife," said Felice Stadler, National Policy Coordinator, National Wildlife Federation.

S. 351 has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics; the American Public Health Association; the American Nurses Association; the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses; the Children's Environmental Health Network. The bill is also endorsed by the Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, U.S. Public Interest Research Group, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense, Health Care Without Harm, Natural Resource Council of Maine, and the Mercury Policy Project.

To see S.351 as presented to the U.S. Senate EPW Committee or a summary of the bill, see <http://www.mercurypolicy.org>. To see state laws and local ordinances banning sales of mercury fever thermometers, as well as resolutions on mercury by various health groups, see [http://www.noharm.org/index.cfm?page\\_ID=14#state](http://www.noharm.org/index.cfm?page_ID=14#state).