

Methylmercury Exposure Reduction Project Update and Recommendations

One aspect of limiting exposure to mercury via consumption of sport fish is currently being addressed by NPDES permit holders in the SF Bay Region. In close collaboration with the California Department of Public Health, municipal stormwater management agencies, Publicly Owned Treatment Works, and industrial dischargers have been contributing approximately \$300,000 during this current permit cycle as part of mercury TMDL implementation to enhance outreach and education to subsistence anglers and other consumers of sport fish from the Bay.

While longer-term efforts are underway to reduce loads of mercury reaching water bodies and manage net methylation of mercury in aquatic environments, this permit-driven pilot project in the Bay Area is focusing on more immediate ways to reduce potential human health impacts associated with consuming contaminated sport fish. This pilot program is proving to be very successful in reaching fish-consuming populations and providing them with means to reduce their exposure to mercury.

A permit-driven approach to funding the exposure reduction element of the mercury problem is likely to be as unsustainable as grant-funded efforts. The BOG and the California Water Quality Monitoring Council may be in a position to recommend sustainable solutions to build on and expand successful elements of the Bay Area pilot to insure that education about mercury contamination and awareness about fish species considered "safe to eat" result in behaviors that lead to reduced exposure to mercury in fish-eating populations.

Desired outcome: Identify a prioritized list of potential funding sources that could allow CDPH to work with community-based organizations in educating key segments of society about adverse health effects of consuming contaminated fish, providing alternatives based on consumption advisories issued by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, and implementing a monitoring system capable of tracking behavior changes in sport-fish consuming populations.