



STATE OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

2 University Place

Albany, New York 12203-3399

Barbara A. DeBuono, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

Dennis P. Whalen
Executive Deputy Commissioner

January 14, 1998

Dr. Arnold Wendroff
544 Eighth Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215

Dear Dr. Wendroff,

Commissioner DeBuono asked me to respond to your fax correspondence of December 16. The Commissioner is aware of your continuing concern over the magico-religious uses of mercury and the potential for adverse health effects to result from residential exposure to mercury from such uses. Our office appreciates your continued efforts to keep us apprised of new information concerning this use of mercury.

As you know, New York City's Department of Health (NYC DOH) and its Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services are collaborating with Montefiore Hospital to assess mercury in children in the South Bronx. At the time of my letter dated August 14, 1997, this assessment was being planned and another similar effort by the Centers for Disease Control was believed to be unnecessary. We continue to hold this opinion. We are in regular communication with our colleagues in NYC DOH on issues of common concern and will monitor the progress of the Montefiore Pediatric Health Study and provide what assistance we can to their efforts.

Again, thank you for your attention to this issue and for your efforts to keep the Health Department informed of new information as it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Edward G. Horn, Ph.D.

Director

Bureau of Toxic Substance Assessment

cc: Ms. Stevenson, NYC DOH
Dr. Lesser, NYC DMH
Ms. Fletcher, EPA



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 2
290 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

2-19-98

Dr. Arnold Wendroff
544 Eight St.
Bklyn., NY 11215-4201

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

I am in receipt of your fax (1/23/98) to Regional Administrator Jeanne Fox regarding the news account of a mercury contamination incident in Texarkana and your consequent inquiry into Region II's state of preparedness for addressing such situations. Also highlighted in your fax transmission was the last paragraph of the news article, which mentions the use of mercury in religious practices by immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean.

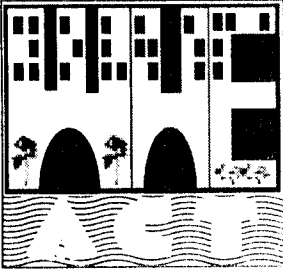
Regarding your former concern, EPA Region II maintains an emergency response program with a 24 hour hotline, which can respond to incidents of hazardous substance releases to the environment. The 24 hour hotline number is either (732) 548- 8730 or toll free thru the National Response Center, 1(800) 424-8802. Based on the information provided by the caller, EPA will determine if a Federal response is required based on a number of factors such as responsible party action and local/state government response actions. If a Federal cleanup is required using Superfund, EPA has cleanup contractors available to perform all necessary mitigation measures.

Regarding your latter concern about the use of mercury in religious rituals, representatives from EPA Region II are participating in an EPA Headquarters initiative (that includes coordination with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and the New York City/State Departments of Health) to address the potential public health ramifications from this practice. Initiatives include support for scientifically-founded research (e.g., Montifiore Medical Center urine mercury screening study) and participation in various outreach programs (including funding for an Environmental Justice grant that you received). It is my understanding that Mark Maddaloni, an environmental scientist on my staff, has periodically spoken with you about the aforementioned mercury-related health concerns and other potential public health hazards posed by exposure to mercury. Please do not hesitate to call Mark at (212) 637-4315 for any further clarification of EPA Region II's activities relating to this matter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "VP", written over a light-colored background.

Vincent Pitruzzello, Chief
Program Support Branch
Emergency and Remedial Response Division



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November 13, 1998

Dr. Arnold Wendroff
Mercury Poisoning Project
544 Eighth Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

Thank you for sending the information on the grant that you have received, congratulations it is a well deserved campaign. Attached to this letter is information that WE ACT has put together so far on mercury. In the future we are planning to write a strong piece on mercury in our newspaper, the *Uptown Eye* and possibly dedicate time on our public access TV show.

I have been in contact with Dr. Graziano and anticipate holding discussions on the possibility of conducting a mercury prevention program in Northern Manhattan. I hope to seek your cooperation should this endeavor get under way. Mercury is an issue that has been kept silent due to factors dealing with ethnic groups, religious beliefs and language that can also translate into barriers when reaching out to segments of the population who use mercury often. In the near future, perhaps we can come up with strategies on how to address these issues that can be interpreted as personal.

Much success on your grant project I will keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Carmen Perez
Community Outreach Coordinator

enclosures



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
LAW DEPARTMENT
100 CHURCH STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007-2601

(212) 788-1575

MICHAEL D. HESS
Corporation Counsel

November 18, 1998

Arnold P. Wendroff
544 Eighth Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215-4201

RE: Mercury Use

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

Thank you again for bringing the issue of the sale and magico-religious usage of mercury products to the attention of our office. As I explained last week, we have consulted with our client, the New York City Department of Health ("DOH"), and have briefed Executive Staff personnel in this office on the issue.

We are still in the process of consulting with the Executive Staff and advising DOH on this matter. Given the importance you clearly attach to this issue, I am sure that you can understand the need to give this matter the deliberation it deserves, rather than hastily proceed without adequate investigation and thought.

As I have assured you, we will inform you promptly, as appropriate, of ultimate determinations that may be made on this issue.

Sincerely,

Renée Hill
Deputy Assistant Chief
Environmental Law Division

ANGEL RODRIGUEZ
COUNCIL MEMBER, 38TH DISTRICT

DISTRICT OFFICE:
406 43RD STREET
BROOKLYN, N.Y. 11232
718-436-2215
FAX: 718-436-2656

CITY HALL OFFICE:
250 BROADWAY
23RD FLOOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007



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December 1, 1998

Mr. Ludovic Blain
New York City Legislative Advocate
New York Public Interest Research Group
9 Murray Street, 3rd Floor
New York, New York 10007-2272

Re: Mercury Poisoning

Dear Mr. Blain:

I have recently met with Dr. Arnold Wendroff of the Mercury Poisoning Project, 544 8th Street, Brooklyn, 11215-4201, regarding the work he has been conducting regarding magico-religious use of mercury in Caribbean and Latino populations in New York.

According to Dr. Wendroff, the use of elemental mercury in these immigrant communities is much more prevalent than one would think and that local botanicas sell mercury without appropriate safety labels. I have enclosed a copy of an article from the December 14, 1997 edition of the New York Times that cites a 1995 study by Montefiore Hospital in which 93 percent of the 41 botanicas surveyed sold elemental mercury.

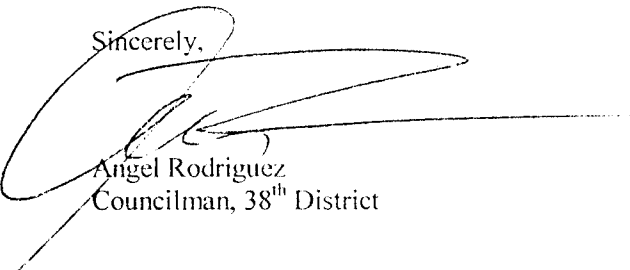
I am certain that you are well aware of the terrible effects mercury can have on people, especially the developing brains of children and the unborn. Unfortunately, it appears that lax enforcement of Federal labeling laws and a lack of public information has led to a potential environmental disaster. My office is currently researching this issue.

I would like to know what, if anything, NYPIRG, has done with respect to the use of mercury in New York City. I believe that, at the very least, a strong education effort and enforcement of labeling laws must take place to ensure a bare minimum of safety.

I respectfully request copies of statistics or studies which NYPIRG may have conducted or have the ability to access with regard to the use of mercury in households. Perhaps we can work together to facilitate a strategy to educate the public.

Thank you for your swift attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Angel Rodriguez
Councilman, 38th District



Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
Atlanta GA 30341-3724
December 29, 1998

Arnold P. Wendroff, Ph.D.
Mercury Poisoning Project
544 Eighth Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215-4201

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

I enjoyed speaking with you over the telephone and appreciate the information you sent me regarding the magico-religious use of mercury (Hg), and its potential for adverse human health effects. The toxicology of mercury is well known. Unlike many environmental contaminants, there exists a wealth of human health research that illustrates the hazards from mercury exposure.

I understand that you are interested in having the CDC further investigate the scope of the problem related to the magico-religious use of mercury and to document health effects related to this problem. As you know, CDC investigations are conducted in partnership with state or local health departments. As I understand it, CDC staff are already in contact with local or state health department staff regarding this issue.

I can appreciate your desire for further investigation into this matter, however, I do not believe additional research is the most pressing priority. Local consumer product or environmental regulations should currently enable local authorities to prevent the further sale of this known dangerous substance. I don't believe it is wise to wait for a 'body count' before enforcing such regulations. If Hg is being sold in a manner that promotes hazardous exposures and local regulatory authority exists to prevent its sale, it would seem prudent to prevent further sale of this product. If local regulations do not exist to prevent further sale, it would seem prudent to enact enabling legislation and then enforce the removal of Hg from being distributed in a dangerous manner.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Tom Sinks", is written over a horizontal line.

Thomas Sinks, Ph.D.
Associate Director for Science
National Center for Environmental Health

NARRATIVE OF EDDIE BAUTISTA, ~~Esq.~~

Thursday, February 4, 1999 2:52 pm Telephone answering machine. (718) 499-8336

Mr. Wendroff, this is Eddie Bautista from New York Lawyers. I just got your mailing. I think you misunderstood what I said. We weren't able to take on the [case] not because of cultural sensitivity, but because the mission of environmental justice, and our mission, is working with community-based groups, not with universities or institutions that may or may not be connected to any community groups. You know, I don't know if you're aware of this, but some universities have actually exploited environmental justice issues locally in order for funding purposes. So its not a question of cultural sensitivity, it's a question of what environmental justice means, which is community based advocacy. My understanding is also that you guys aren't the first to address this issue. The Puerto Rican Family Institute did a comprehensive study on mercury use in cultural religious settings. For what its worth, I think that you know, if you guys were somewhat community based, working with environmental justice leaders on this issue, it would be a different story. Other than just what appears to be an academic exercise. Well, anyway, good luck to you. Bye.