



U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207

March 14, 2000

The Honorable Anthony D. Weiner
U.S. House of Representatives
501 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Weiner:

This will respond to your letter and the concerns expressed by your constituent, Dr. Arnold Wendroff regarding elemental mercury. Under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act, mercury is not banned, but is required to bear cautionary labeling when sold to consumers to warn them about potential hazards presented by the product.

Within the last year we have inspected many botanicas that were selling mercury without the appropriate cautionary statements. Letters of advice were issued to the proprietors informing them that they were distributing a misbranded hazardous substance. By letter, the staff gave the proprietors the labeling that would be required to meet the minimum requirements of the FHSA. The staff also gave the proprietors a copy of the safety alert on mercury that was written in 1991 to address the concerns associated with the ritualistic use of mercury.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. Wager", written over a horizontal line.

Robert J. Wager
Director Congressional Relations



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

The Honorable Anthony D. Weiner
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

MAR 16 2000

Dear Congressman Weiner:

OFFICE OF
SOLID WASTE AND EMERGENCY
RESPONSE

Thank you for your letter of February 1, 2000, to Carol M. Browner, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), regarding the concerns of your constituent Dr. Arnold Wendroff about the ritualistic uses of elemental mercury. Administrator Browner has asked me to respond.

I am committed to addressing the threat of the ritualistic uses of mercury and hope that Dr. Wendroff will continue to work closely with the Ritualistic Uses of Mercury Task Force. Convened in January 1999, its active members include representatives from EPA, the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR), and various state and city Departments of Health, including the New York City Department of Health and the New York State Department of Health. The multi-agency Task Force recently developed a draft action plan to:

- evaluate the extent of the threat from ritualistic uses of elemental mercury;
- create a strategic plan to educate users of potential hazards;
- develop a research agenda to better define the extent of the problem;
- draft a national public health and environmental protocol to address potential problems.

The action plan will intensify EPA's efforts to understand and address this threat. Toward this end, we are working closely with the National Alliance for Hispanic Health (NAHH) to convene an expert panel this summer to review the action plan and help develop a national strategy. These consultations, which will include Dr. Wendroff and health experts from the Latino and Caribbean community, will be invaluable in developing our next steps.

Also, the Task Force is coordinating its efforts with EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) to ensure that ritualistic use of mercury is included in future mercury research plans. This research will be essential in helping to quantify the potential exposure to at-risk populations.

Thank you again for your letter and your interest in our efforts to address this insidious problem. Please call Peter Redmond, EPA's team leader for the Ritualistic Use of Mercury Task Force, at (703) 603-8751 if you would like any additional information.



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Sincerely,

Stephen D. Luftig, Director
Office of Emergency and Remedial Response

cc: Dr. Arnold Wendroff