



February 17, 2005

Arlene Becker, Chair
House Human Services Committee
Montana House of Representatives
Helena MT 59620

EXHIBIT 2
DATE 2-18-05
HB 665

RE: HB 665

Dear Representative Becker and members of the committee,

The Missoula City-County Health Department supports HB 665 to commit to the phasing out of non-essential mercury containing products in Montana. This bill will restrict the sale of consumer products (like thermometers and thermostats) that contain mercury, to improve recycling of mercury-containing products and enhance public education on the impacts of mercury. This bill will reduce the amount of mercury currently found in Montana's landfills and wastewater treatment systems that have the potential to contaminate our soil, water and air.

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can affect the brain, spinal cord, kidneys and liver. Early exposure to mercury can have devastating impacts on the brains and nervous systems of children. It can result in problems developing language, memory impairments, vision and fine motor coordination issues, short attention spans and more. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, up to one in 10 women in the U.S. already carry enough mercury in their blood to pose a threat of neurological damage to the fetus. In addition, some 630,000 children are born with mercury levels exceeding the safety threshold of 5.8 parts per billion each year according to the National Health and Nutrition Evaluation Survey,

Montana already has many water bodies with fish too contaminated with mercury to be eaten safely. The MT Department of Public Health & Human Services and the MT Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks have jointly issued fish consumption advisories for Montana water bodies. There are several STATEWIDE advisories – meaning they apply to ALL rivers and lakes in Montana. We have gotten to a point where families can no longer go out fishing with their children and be assured they can eat their catch safely.

There is approximately 1 gram of mercury in a typical fever thermometer. This is enough mercury to contaminate a lake with a surface area of about 20 acres, to the degree that fish would be unsafe to eat. Even these small amounts of mercury can pose a significant health threat when spilled in a small, poorly ventilated room. Now Montana has the chance to contribute to national and global efforts to reduce our exposure to mercury.

Sincerely,

Peter Nielsen
Environmental Health Supervisor