



WE

Women's Voices for the Earth

EXHIBIT 12
DATE 2.4.05
HB 455

February 4, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Alexandra Gorman and I am the Director of Science and Research for Women's Voices for the Earth, an environmental health organization here in Montana. I am here in support of HB 455.

Mercury is a persistent bioaccumulative toxic metal. It persists in our environment and builds up in our bodies. Young children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and women of childbearing age are at greatest risk of adverse health effects from mercury exposure. We get that mercury exposure predominately from eating fish heavily contaminated with mercury.

What happens when we eat mercury-laden fish? It is toxic to our nervous system. Mercury exposure, particularly pre-natal exposure when the brain is still developing – can cause neurological and developmental problems such as poor attention span, delayed language development, impaired memory, vision and hearing, learning disabilities and impaired fine motor coordination.

Mercury exposure, early in life, hampers those crucial skills children and adults need to function in our world, to go to school, get a job, and be productive citizens. Mercury contamination gives children a handicap – it can mean the difference between regular ed and special ed, between active and hyperactive, between college graduate and high school dropout.

A recent study from the Journal of Pediatrics tracked children of mothers who ate contaminated fish during their pregnancy. The study has been ongoing for 14 years. They are still seeing mental delays and hearing deficits in these children. The scientists have concluded that these neurological problems are irreversible – all because their mothers ate fish during pregnancy.

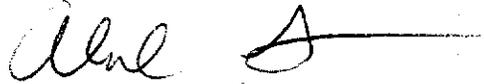
Don't be fooled., This is happening here in Montana. We all know children affected by these symptoms. You'll hear that mercury is a global problem. That nothing we do on a state level would make a difference. Well that's simply not true. Ten years ago in South Florida, the local health department banned the eating of certain types of local fish due to extensive mercury contamination (just as we have done here in Montana). Over the last 10 years, the local authorities have worked to reduce local industrial emissions of mercury in the area through regulations and pollution control. They reduced local mercury emissions by 90%. When they recently re-tested the local fish (that had been banned for consumption), mercury levels in those fish were down 75%! Simply by controlling local mercury emissions. It works. HB 455 works.

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We have an obligation to the children of Montana to help them put their best foot forward to succeed in life. This means reducing their exposure to mercury. HB 455 will do just that.

Thank you very much.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexandra Gorman', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alexandra Gorman
Director of Science and Research
Women's Voices for the Earth