



**INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY**  
2105 FIRST AVENUE SOUTH  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404 USA

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Kathleen Schuler, IATP, 612-382-5917  
Michael Bender, 802-223-9000

### **Store-bought Fish in MN Tests Unsafe For Mercury: National Study Finds High Levels in Tuna and Swordfish Coalition Recommends Supermarket Warning Signs, Regular Testing of Commercial Fish to Protect Public Health**

Minneapolis – A swordfish purchased in a Minnesota grocery store contained mercury levels more than 60 percent above what the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers safe, according to a major 22-state mercury-testing project. The national project, led by Oceana and the Mercury Policy Project, confirmed that store-bought swordfish and tuna contain levels of mercury that the federal government has determined may be hazardous to human health, particularly children.

This project analyzed six times more swordfish than the FDA has in the past five years combined, and eight times more tuna than the FDA has in the past eight years, according to the FDA's database. The full report and testing results are available at: [www.mercurypolicy.org](http://www.mercurypolicy.org).

The swordfish purchased from the St. Paul Whole Foods contained the third highest level of mercury in the country - 1.633 parts per million (ppm). Nationally, an average mercury concentration in swordfish of 1.1 parts per million (ppm) exceeds the FDA Action Level for commercial fish - the limit at which the agency can legally remove it from the market. The results suggest a random shopper has a 50-50 chance of buying swordfish in a grocery store with mercury levels considered unsafe by the FDA.

“Mercury-laden swordfish directly threaten pregnant women, their fetuses, and others,” said Kathleen Schuler, IATP staff scientist who purchased the swordfish for the project. “Swordfish with mercury levels as high as we found at Whole Foods should be pulled from the market. It shouldn't be up to shoppers to do this kind of safety testing. The FDA needs to take responsibility for public health, dramatically increase testing, and pull fish with dangerous mercury levels off the market.”

Tuna steaks bought at Whole Foods measured much lower (.116 ppm) than the national average of .33 ppm, the tests found. The .33 ppm average in tuna is comparable to that of canned albacore tuna, a fish targeted for limited consumption by women of childbearing age and children in a 2004 joint advisory from the FDA and the Environmental Protection Agency.

In California, state law requires that stores post warning signs for mercury-contaminated fish. Whole Foods complies with this requirement in California, but not in Minnesota.

“When it comes to mercury, shoppers deserve better than to be left in the dark by FDA,” said Schuler. “Posting warning signs in grocery store fish departments for fish known to be high in mercury, like swordfish, is a simple, common-sense solution.”

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that has been linked to learning disabilities and developmental delays in children, as well as damage to the heart, nervous system and kidneys in adults. Mercury enters the environment primarily via pollution from power plants, chlorine production facilities, waste incinerators and other sources. Coal plants, the largest source of mercury emissions at 42 percent nationally, are still largely unregulated. “The technology is available for coal plants to reduce 90 percent of mercury emissions, but federal and/or state regulation is needed to achieve mercury reductions that comply with the Clean Air Act,” says Schuler.

Forty-five states have issued advisories warning sensitive populations about the dangers of eating mercury-contaminated fish, and in 2004, the FDA and the EPA advised women of childbearing age and young children to avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish, and to limit consumption of canned albacore tuna and fresh tuna to 6 oz. per week.

To protect and inform the public about the risks of mercury poisoning, the coalition releasing the testing results made these recommendations:

- State and federal governments should require warnings to be posted where fish covered by government advisories are sold.
- In the absence of federal and state requirements, grocery stores should post signs to communicate mercury advisories.
- The FDA should regularly test commercial fish for mercury content.
- The FDA should not interfere with states’ efforts to educate citizens about mercury in seafood.

As part of the testing project, fish were collected from: Alaska, California, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont and Wisconsin. The fish were bought in major grocery stores, including Shaw’s, Whole Foods, Albertsons, Sav-a-Center, Winn-Dixie, Dominick’s, Kroger, Trader Joe’s, Genuardi’s, Safeway and Carrs. The samples were tested at the University of North Carolina’s Environmental Quality Institute between July 7 and August 11.

IATP has published an on-line Smartfish calculator ([www.iatp.org/foodandhealth](http://www.iatp.org/foodandhealth)) where consumers can enter their weight and type of fish to get information on safe levels of consumption based on EPA guidelines. Smarter fish consumption can help maintain good health. Fish are a good source of protein, vitamin D, as well as beneficial omega-3 fatty acids, which help prevent heart disease and promote mental health and healthy brain development in infants and children. Fish-lovers should not stop eating fish—just eat fish that are lower in contaminants like mercury.

The full report and testing results are available at: [www.mercurypolicy.org](http://www.mercurypolicy.org).

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