

SENATOR COLLINS TESTIFIES ON DANGERS OF MERCURY, NEED FOR BETTER SCIENTIFIC MEASUREMENTS

Senate Environment Committee to Consider Senator Collins' Mercury Monitoring Legislation



Senator Collins testifies before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works in support of her legislation to create a nationwide mercury monitoring network

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Washington, DC -

Senator Susan Collins today testified before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on the health and environmental dangers of mercury and about legislation she has introduced to improve the scientific measurement of mercury in the U.S. Senator Collins has authored and introduced the "Mercury Monitoring Act" with Senators Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY) that would establish mercury monitoring sites across the nation in order to measure mercury levels in the air, rain, soil, lakes and streams, plants, and animals.

"In the wrong form, mercury is an acutely dangerous toxin that can cause serious neurodevelopmental harm, especially to children and pregnant women," said Senator Collins. "To see just how toxic mercury is, one does not have to look any farther than my home state of Maine. Every freshwater lake, river, and stream in my state is subject to a mercury advisory warning pregnant women and young children to limit consumption of fish caught in these waters. This advisory is especially difficult for indigenous peoples, like those of the Penobscot Indian Nation, for whom subsistence fishing is an historically important part of their culture."

Senator Collins' legislation would authorize \$18 million in fiscal year 2008, and additional funding through 2013, for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), United States Geological Survey, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to perform scientific mercury measurements. These agencies would measure long-term changes in mercury levels in the air and watersheds, including mercury levels in plants and animals, at multiple monitoring sites in different ecosystems across the country. The bill would create a "Mercury Monitoring Advisory Committee" to advise the EPA Administrator in choosing the monitoring sites.

"Mercury is dangerous not only to people, but also to wildlife," said Senator Collins. "The Biodiversity Research Institute in Gorham, Maine, found that mercury concentrations in loon eggs in Maine were dangerously high, nearly four times higher than those found in Alaska."

Senator Collins also testified today that when the EPA issued the Clean Air Mercury Rule in 2005, it was not based on sound science. Senators Collins and Lieberman met with the EPA Administrator in 2005 in order to express concern over the rule. The extent of the flaws in the EPA data became apparent earlier this year with the publication of several new studies by David Evers and Wing Goodale of the Biodiversity Research Institute in Gorham, Maine, and other researchers.

"These new studies demonstrate the existence of mercury hotspots in the northeastern United States and attribute much of the cause of the hotspots where mercury is concentrated to emissions from power plants," said Senator Collins. "The studies conflict markedly with EPA's computer modeling data which was used to justify the EPA mercury rule. For example, the studies showed that mercury deposition is five times higher than previously estimated near a coal plant in southern New Hampshire. These studies demonstrate the need for real-world mercury measurements - not just computer models."

"I believe our legislation would provide the scientific measurements we need in order to more accurately assess the extent of the mercury problem in this country, and to provide better information on how to address this serious problem."

Senator Collins has long led efforts in the Senate to help reduce dangerous mercury emissions. She is an original cosponsor of legislation introduced by Senator Tom Carper (D-DE), titled the Clean Air Planning Act, that would reduce mercury emissions at power plants by 90-percent by 2015. The legislation would also address the pollutants that cause smog, acid rain, and climate change.

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Senator Collins testifies at a subcommittee hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in support of her legislation to create a nationwide mercury monitoring network