



News Release

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Senators Collins, Carper Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Track Mercury Pollution

Washington, D.C. – Mercury is a potent neurotoxin of significant ecological and public health concern, especially for children and pregnant women. An estimated 200,000 children born in the United States each year are exposed to levels of mercury in the womb that are high enough to impair neurological development.

Right now, however, scientists must rely on limited information to understand the critical linkages between mercury emissions and environmental response and human health. In order to successfully design, implement, and assess solutions to the problem of mercury pollution, scientists need comprehensive long-term data.

To help remedy this discrepancy and procure this critical data, **U.S. Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Tom Carper (D-DE) introduced the Comprehensive National Mercury Monitoring Act**, a bipartisan bill that would establish a national mercury monitoring network to protect human health, safeguard fisheries, and track the environmental effects of emissions reductions.

“Mercury is one of the most persistent and dangerous pollutants that threatens our health and environment today. This powerful toxin affects the senses, brain, spinal cord, kidneys, and liver. It poses significant risks to children and pregnant women, causing an elevated risk of birth defects and problems with motor skills,” said Senator Collins. “This legislation would establish a comprehensive, robust national monitoring network for mercury to provide the data needed to help make decisions to protect the people and environment of Maine and the United States.”

“Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that poses serious health risks to the brain, the heart and immune system, particularly those of unborn babies,” said Senator Carper. “For over a decade, Senator Collins and I have made reduction of mercury pollution in the environment a

priority. When we first started our efforts, every year, an estimated 600,000 babies had been exposed to unsafe levels of mercury in our country. Today, because of federal policies now in place, this number is down to 200,000. We must continue building on this progress, and that's why today, I'm proud to introduce this legislation with Senator Collins that would establish a comprehensive mercury monitoring system to help scientists and policymakers better identify how mercury is getting into our environment and where mercury levels are too high. With this critical information, we can help those who fish address mercury contamination and reduce the harms mercury poses to families across America."

The *Comprehensive National Mercury Monitoring Act* has been endorsed by the American Lung Association, the Biodiversity Research Institute, the Environmental Health Strategy Center, the League of Conservation Voters, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Science Policy Exchange.

"I thank Senators Collins and Carper for their leadership in protecting the public from toxic mercury pollution," **said Harold P. Wimmer, National President and CEO of the American Lung Association.** "The nation has made great progress in reducing emissions of this harmful air pollutant under the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, but more must be done to protect the health of all Americans, including the developing brains of children, from mercury."

"The U.N.'s global treaty aims to protect human and environmental health from emissions and releases of mercury that stem from human activities such as burning coal or small-scale artisanal gold mining. Long-term mercury monitoring—locally, regionally, and globally—is critical to measuring the treaty's effectiveness over time," **said David C. Evers, Ph.D., executive director of Maine-based Biodiversity Research Institute.** "The legislation introduced by Senators Collins and Carper allows the U.S. to take a leadership role in providing a comprehensive long-term mercury-monitoring program that will benefit the entire global community."

"As many as 200,000 babies are born in the U.S. each year with mercury levels high enough to impair their neurological development. That is unacceptable," **said John Walke, Clean Air Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.** "We urgently need to better understand mercury's ubiquitous presence in our environment. Creating a comprehensive mercury monitoring program will help us take further action to limit its dangerous presence in our environment."

"This important bill will help protect people from mercury by filling a major gap in our nation's pollution tracking system," **said Kathy Fallon Lambert, Director of the Science Policy Exchange.** "It will enable scientists and public officials to evaluate the impact of policy changes on mercury in our air and water, and in the fish we eat."

Specifically, the *Comprehensive National Mercury Monitoring Act* would:

- Direct the Environmental Protection Agency, in conjunction with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the National Park Service, the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Association, and other appropriate federal agencies, to establish a national mercury monitoring program to measure and monitor mercury levels in the air and watersheds; water and soil chemistry; and marine, freshwater, and terrestrial organisms across the nation;

- Establish a scientific advisory committee to advise on the establishment, site selection, measurement, recording protocols, and operations of the monitoring program;
- Establish a centralized database for existing and newly collected environmental mercury data that can be freely accessed on the Internet and is comprised of data that is compatible with similar international efforts;
- Require a report to Congress every two years on the program, including trends, and an assessment of the reduction in mercury deposition rates that need to be achieved in order to prevent adverse human and ecological effects every four-years; and
- Authorize \$95 million over three years to carry out this legislation.

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