

>From: ALEXIS CAIN[SMTP:CAIN.ALEXIS@EPAMAIL.EPA.GOV]

>Sent: Wednesday, July 16, 1997 10:12AM

>To: Gilkeson, John; Swain, Ed; Brooks, Ned; Carey, Patrick;

>gross.stephen@a1.dep.state.pa.us; kratzers@deq.state.mi.us;

>stoulori1@deq.state.mi.us; huberk@dnr.state.wi.us; eanan1@dnrmail.dnr.wisc.gov;

>psmit@opn.dem.state.in.us

>Cc: BIOUS.MICHAEL@EPAMAIL.EPA.GOV; MARTIG.ANTON@EPAMAIL.EPA.GOV;

>ZAR.HOWARD@EPAMAIL.EPA.GOV

>Subject: Ritual Mercury Use Report, Chicago Dept. of Public Health

>

>I have received a report on ritual use of mercury from the Office of  
>Hispanic Affairs, Chicago Department of Public Health. This report was  
>done under a grant from our Indoor Air Program. I will send copies

>around in the next mailing of the Great Lakes Mercury Workgroup (if  
>you're not on the Workgroup mailing list, but would like a copy, let me  
>know). In the meantime, here are some highlights:

>

>--A survey was conducted of 79 individuals--55 female, 24 male-- who  
>are Hispanic clients of the Chicago Outreach Health Promoters or of the  
>CDPH Maternal and Child Program. Of these, 15 individuals-- 14 female, 1  
>male--had used mercury for ritual purposes or folk remedies (a 16th  
>person had used mercury in high school science class).

>

>--Of the 79 surveyed, 48 were of Mexican origin, 14 Puerto Rican, 9  
>Guatemalan, 4 Salvadorean, 4 Other. Of the ritual/folk remedy users, 6  
>were Mexican, 6 Puerto Rican, 1 Guatemalan, 2 Salvadorean. Thus, 6  
>out of 14 Puerto Ricans surveyed had used mercury. Additional info on  
>age/educational background, etc. is available in the report, and in the raw  
>data available from CDPH.

>

>--Two of those surveyed use mercury at least once per month; three  
>others had used mercury during the last year

>

>--Mercury was obtained primarily from Botanicas, but also from friends  
>and folk healers.

>

>--Methods of use include carrying the mercury in a purse or amulet,  
>mixing it with water used for house cleaning, putting it in bath water,  
>putting it in a glass of water kept under the bed, pouring it onto a candle  
>and burning it, swallowing it in a capsule or drink.

>

>-- 16 Botanicas were visited, all of which sold mercury. Only four of the  
>botanicas included a warning label with the mercury.

>

>--The Report recommends education to the at-risk population; training of  
>health providers regarding mercury use and toxicity; inclusion of mercury  
>use as a component in health histories and assessments of Hispanic  
>medical patients; support of the traditional use Botanicas, along with  
>education of proprietors, folk healers and consumers about the dangers  
>of mercury; examination of options for regulating botanicas--i.e. requiring  
>a license and prohibiting the sale of toxic substances.

>

>Apparently, the CDPH ran into some resistance during the course of

>doing their research from community health people who were concerned  
>that this effort would lead to shutting down botanicas, which some see  
>as an important community resource. Clearly, raises some fears and  
>concerns in parts of the Hispanic community.

>

>The Chicago Department of Public Health plans to follow up with publicity  
>in local Spanish-language media, outreach to the public and health  
>providers, and also with an effort to assess the possible health effects  
>of mercury use on the specific individuals identified as users in the  
>surveys.

>

>I think that this report provides important evidence that there is a  
>significant issue of ritual mercury use in the Chicago Hispanic population.  
>The data in the report could be useful for efforts to target  
>research/outreach in other areas with significant Hispanic populations.

>