



South Florida Water Management District

3301 Gun Club Road • P.O. Box 24680 • West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4680 • (407) 686-8800 • FL WATS 1-800-432-2045

RES 14-02

January 17, 1992

Dr. Arnold Wendroff
298 Marlborough Road
Brooklyn, NY 11226

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

Thank you for the information concerning the magico-religious uses of mercury by members of the Hispanic and Haitian communities. I have taken the liberty of forwarding this information to Dr. Tom Atkeson of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. Dr. Atkeson is the Staff Director of the Governor's Mercury in Fish and Wildlife Task Force. His office would also be responsible for any monitoring or research programs concerning mercury and human health. Based on the materials you supplied, one area of concern is if a monitoring program to ascertain mercury levels in recreational and subsistence fish consumers were developed, the results could possibly be misleading due to the magico-religious uses of mercury as outlined in the articles. The exact magnitude of the domestic use of mercury in South Florida needs to be determined.

For your information, Dr. Atkeson can be reached at:

Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services
1317 Winewood Blvd.
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700
(904) 488-3370

I appreciate your interest and efforts to protect the public's health. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Pfeuffer".

Richard Pfeuffer
Senior Environment Scientist
Everglades Systems Division
Research Department

RP/sj

c: T. Federico
T. Fontaine

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Consumer Product SAFETY ALERT

FROM THE U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20507

Mercury Vapors Are Hazardous

Because some herb-selling shops or "botanicas" sell mercury for use in homes, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is alerting consumers that mercury vapors (which have no odor) are hazardous. CPSC recommends that consumers avoid breathing mercury vapors. Most uses of mercury that expose consumers to fumes are banned. However, some ethnic traditions encourage the sprinkling of mercury around the house for religious reasons. This is hazardous because people -- especially young children -- could breathe the mercury vapors.

Mercury can cause serious and permanent nerve and kidney damage. Mercury poisoning (arteryria) has these symptoms: rapid heartbeat, sweating, irritability or hostility, withdrawal of shyness, memory loss, peeling of hands and feet, leg pain, slight hand tremors, difficulty with fine motor control (such as handwriting), sleeplessness, and headaches. Young children and children born to women exposed during pregnancy may be especially sensitive.

If you believe you have mercury poisoning, see a doctor. If mercury has been sprinkled in your home, open all windows so the mercury vapors can escape. It may take several days of ventilation to eliminate the mercury. If you have questions about how to clean up and dispose of mercury, call your local health department. To avoid mercury poisoning, do not sprinkle mercury around the house or expose people in the home to mercury vapors.