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Agency for Toxic Substances  
and Disease Registry  
Atlanta GA 30333

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

MAR 13 2001

Thank you for your most recent letter to the Assistant Administrator, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) regarding mercury sold for magico-religious and ethnomedical uses in New York City, New York. You asked that ATSDR perform a public health assessment regarding the effects of mercury sold by botanicas and other retail outlets for those uses. You included the results of inspections of two shops in New York City with measured levels of mercury in the ambient air.

As the information you provided suggests potential hazards to persons in occupational and residential environments, we have requested assistance from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), our sister public health service agency. To learn how ATSDR could support their efforts, ATSDR had discussions with the New York City and New York State Departments of Health regarding their ongoing investigation of mercury exposures. In response to public concern regarding mercury sales and use, the New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) Offices of Environmental and Occupational Disease Epidemiology (EODE) and Environmental Investigations (OEI) will conduct investigations in botanicas that have been reported to sell mercury. EODE will distribute educational and informational materials in English, Spanish, and Creole. OEI will be responsible for conducting environmental assessments for the presence of mercury vapors in the botanica and residential apartments located above the botanica, and for issuing corrective recommendations and orders.

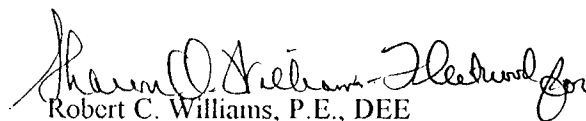
ATSDR and NIOSH expect to receive a written protocol within the next few days. We have agreed to provide technical comments and assistance to the City regarding the assessment of human health exposures to mercury. ATSDR believes that the above action is our most appropriate public health response to the concerns you identified.

ATSDR will provide you with periodic updates regarding its support of the NYCDOH activities. Mr. Chris Agnew, ATSDR Regional Representative, Region II, is ATSDR's communications point-of-contact for these activities.

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We appreciate your sharing this important information with us. If you have further information to share, please contact Mr. Agnew in New York City at telephone (212) 637-4304.

Sincerely yours,

  
Robert C. Williams, P.E., DEE  
Assistant Surgeon General

Director, Division of Health Assessment and Consultation

cc:  
Edward G. Horn  
New York State Department of Health

Don Miles  
New York State Department of Health

Ms. Nancy Jeffries  
New York City Department of Health