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ALAN G. HEVESI
COMPTROLLER

May 18, 2000

Arnold P. Wendroff, Ph.D
Mercury Poisoning Project
544 Eight Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215-4201

Dear Mr. Wendroff:

Several staff members from the Comptroller's Bureaus of Engineering, Law and Adjustment and the Office of Policy Management met to discuss the very serious issue you raised in a recent letter to Comptroller Hevesi. You alert us to the ritual use of elemental mercury in religious practices and how exposure to this toxic substance could adversely impact a child's learning ability, potentially costing the City significant sums for Special Education. You also posit how property owners facing expensive clean up costs would seek to shift their financial burden onto the City.

We contacted the New York City Department of Health (DOH) and learned that, in addition to the recently distributed mercury brochures, which they sent to medical providers specializing in children and family medicine, they and the Federal Consumer Products Safety Board will soon begin a mercury education and enforcement campaign. We agree that a widespread education campaign is the appropriate way to educate the public on the danger posed by inappropriate handling of mercury. Therefore, we will make a formal request to the DOH for a report on this important public education initiative, which we understand, will include labeling inspections. We will review it and, if appropriate, make recommendations for improvements.

The Department of Environmental Protection has assured us that all sewage treatment plant monitoring for mercury influent and effluents show compliance with permit standards.

Also, the Department of Consumer Affairs reported no record of consumer complaints on improper packaging or labeling of mercury. We recognize that the absence of consumer complaints merely emphasizes the need for the DOH education campaign.

We thank you for bringing this matter to our attention and we look forward to hearing from you when the results are published on the clinical and environmental studies you mentioned in your letter.

Sincerely,

Rosaria R. Esperon
Deputy Comptroller for Claims & Adjudications

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