



Oregon
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**Testimony before Senate Environment and Natural Resources
Committee on SB 1512**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We bring Oregonians together for a healthy environment.

The Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) **supports SB 1512** to limit the amount of mercury content in lighting products (CFLs and other fluorescent lighting) sold in Oregon. SB 1512 provides a reasonable solution to continue to reduce the amount of mercury in Oregon's environment.

Oregon Environmental Council has worked on programs and policies—both voluntary and regulatory—to reduce mercury contamination in Oregon for over a decade. Because it is highly toxic and a significant threat to children's health, OEC has prioritized reducing mercury contamination as critical to safeguarding the health of Oregon children. We were part of the 2001 Oregon Mercury Solution Team comprised of a broad set of stakeholders tasked with developing a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the release of mercury from human activities in Oregon by the year 2020. Also in 2001, OEC was part of a coalition supporting passage of the Mercury Reduction Act of 2001, which addressed mercury from certain products such as thermometers, thermostats and automotive switches.

Even at very low levels, mercury is highly toxic, especially to children. It is a potent neurotoxin. It can damage the brain development of children who are exposed by eating contaminated fish, as well as fetuses who are exposed through their mother's consumption of contaminated fish. It can also pass to a nursing infant through breast milk. Children exposed to mercury show irreversible damage to their central nervous systems, lowered intelligence, impaired hearing and poor coordination. Their verbal and motor skills may be delayed. Prenatal mercury exposure has also recently been implicated in preterm birth.

According to the CDC, 8% of U.S. women of childbearing age have enough mercury in their blood to pose a threat of neurological damage to the fetus. A 2000 report by the National Academy of Sciences estimates that 60,000 babies born each year in the U.S. face a serious threat of learning disabilities or other neurological problems because their mothers ate fish contaminated with mercury during their pregnancies. Oregon currently has fish consumption advisories for mercury on 13 water bodies warning pregnant women and young children not to eat certain fish, including the entire main stem of the Willamette River.

Once released into the environment, mercury does not disappear or degrade. It persists for decades and as it moves up the food chain, it increases in concentration.

Mercury pollution poses a serious health threat to all Oregonians, especially pregnant women and children. It takes a surprisingly small amount of mercury to contaminate fish so they are unsafe to eat.

SB 1512 provides Oregon with needed restrictions to reduce mercury-contamination, leading to a safer and healthier environment for all Oregonians.