

Press Release of Senator Collins

SENATE UNANIMOUSLY PASSES SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS'S BILL TO BAN MERCURY FEVER THERMOMETERS NATIONWIDE

Mercury Reduction and Disposal Act has ban, swap, and disposal components to reduce threat of mercury contamination

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The United States Senate this evening unanimously passed legislation introduced by Senator Susan Collins calling for a nationwide ban on the sale of mercury fever thermometers. The bill also would help solve some of the nation's worst long-term mercury retirement problems.

The bill, The Mercury Reduction and Disposal Act, addresses the serious problem of mercury in the environment and mercury disposal by, for the first time, establishing a national mercury retirement policy. It takes special aim at one of the most common and widely distributed sources of mercury: mercury fever thermometers.

"Many of us know from personal experience that mercury fever thermometers are very easily broken. When this happens, the improper disposal of the mercury can have severe environmental and physical consequences. One mercury thermometer contains about one gram of mercury. Despite its small size, one of these thermometers contains enough mercury to contaminate all the fish in a 20-acre lake."

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that mercury thermometers contribute approximately 17 tons of mercury to solid waste per year.

Senator Collins's bill calls for a nationwide ban on the sale of such thermometers. It also provides for a grant program to help consumers exchange mercury thermometers for digital or other alternatives. "By bringing in mercury thermometers for proper disposal, consumers will ensure the mercury from their thermometers doesn't end up polluting our lakes and threatening our health. It will also reduce the risk of breakage and contamination inside the home."

Another important component of the bill is the safe disposal of the mercury collected from thermometers in the exchange program. The bill directs the EPA to ensure that the mercury is properly collected and stored to keep it out of the environment and out of commerce. "This mercury will not reenter the environment, and it will not be sent to India, one of the largest manufacturers of mercury thermometers."

The bill creates an interagency task force to address the problem of the global circulation of mercury and ways to reduce the mercury threat to humans and the environment. The task force, to be chaired by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, would also be charged with identifying long-term means of disposing of mercury and comprehensive solutions to the global mercury problem.

