

Written Testimony of Noele Kidney, Project Coordinator of the

Connecticut Public Health Association

**AN ACT REQUIRING CERTAIN THERMOSTAT MANUFACTURERS TO PAY  
INCENTIVES FOR THE RETURN OF MERCURY THERMOSTATS**

**Senate Bill 205**

Environment Committee

March 7, 2011

Dear Senator Meyer and Representative Roy, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

For over 90 years, the Connecticut Public Health Association (CPHA) has been committed to fulfilling its mission to “represent and unite the diverse expertise of Connecticut’s public health professionals, to improve the most pressing public health issues in the state, and to promote healthy and safe living for the people of Connecticut.” CPHA has more than 300 members representing a wide variety of disciplines, all united in the goal of protecting and promoting the public's health. Because of this, I along with CPHA would like to urge the members of the Environment Committee to support **Senate Bill 205 – AN ACT REQUIRING CERTAIN THERMOSTAT MANUFACTURERS TO PAY INCENTIVES FOR THE RETURN OF MERCURY THERMOSTATS**. Mercury is a highly toxic chemical and a major contaminant of the marine food supply – and therefore a danger to public health.

Once mercury enters the environment through any number of ways – thermostats, batteries, thermometers, and light bulbs -- it can change to methyl mercury, a serious neurotoxin.<sup>1 2</sup>

Mercury builds up over time in living tissues of humans and wildlife, and this bio-accumulative process can have serious health effects including irreversible neurological and reproductive harm. Mercury does not break down in the environment and so over time it continues to pose a serious health risk to everyone. Scientific studies have shown that mercury exposure can

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<sup>1</sup> Interstate Mercury Education and Reductions Clearinghouse (2010, January) Mercury Use in Thermostats. Available from <http://www.newmoa.org/prevention/mercury/imerc/factsheets/thermostats.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (2001). Environmental Compliance Annual Report 2001, Special Feature: Focus on Mercury. Available from <http://www.ct.gov/dep/lib/dep/enforcement/reports/2001/annualreport.pdf>

permanently damage the brain, central nervous system, red blood cells, and kidneys. Behavioral and Physical changes – including vision, hearing and memory loss have also been linked to mercury poisoning.<sup>3 4 5 6</sup> Methyl mercury exposure can cause impaired neurological development in fetuses, infants, and children – and studies have shown that prenatal methyl mercury exposure negatively impacts children’s cognitive thinking, memory, language, and fine motor and visual spatial skills.<sup>2 3</sup>

Nearly a decade ago, the dangers associated with exposure to mercury spurred lawmakers to begin phasing out the sale of mercury-containing products. Products containing more than one gram of mercury (including thermostats) were banned from being sold within Connecticut.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, many thermostats still pose a risk to public health since many thermostats sold prior to the ban contain enough mercury that, if disposed of improperly, would be a threat to public health and the environment.

It is estimated that more than 50 million mercury-containing thermostats have been sold since 1950 for use in homes and offices. While the use of thermostats containing mercury has decreased substantially in recent years, there are still many in use.<sup>8</sup> As homeowners and businesses begin to replace their older thermostats with newer ones, it is vital that the older models are disposed of properly – and responsibly. Many states offer financial incentives for recycling mercury thermostats and preliminary collection results show that these incentives have

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<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Environmental Protection Agency (2011). Health Effects and Methyl mercury Effects. Available from <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/effects.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Grandjean, P., H Satoh, K Murata, and K Eto. Adverse effects of methyl mercury: Environmental health research implications. *Environ Health Perspectives*, August 2010, 118(8); p. 1137-45.

<sup>5</sup> Selin, NE, EM Sunderland, CD Knightes, and RP Mason (2010, January). Sources of mercury exposure for U.S. seafood consumers: Implications for policy. *Environ Health Perspectives*, January 2010, 118(1): p. 137-43.

<sup>6</sup> Mergler, D., HA Anderson, LH Man Chan, KR Mahaffey, M Murray, M Sakamoto, and AH Stern (2007, February). Methyl mercury Exposure and health Effects in Humans: A Worldwide Concern. *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, February 2007, 36(1), p. 3-11.

<sup>7</sup> Public Act 02-90.

<sup>8</sup> Northeast Waste Management Officials’ Association. Trends in mercury use in products: Summary of the Interstate Mercury Education & Reduction Clearinghouse (IMERC) Mercury-added Products Database (2008, June) Available from <http://www.newmoa.org/prevention/mercury/imerc/factsheets/mercuryinproducts.pdf>

played a key role in increasing recycling rates.<sup>1</sup> Therefore it makes good public health sense to support this initiative. The Connecticut Public Health Association urges you to support Senate Bill 205, which we believe will move the state closer toward the goal of eliminating the risk that mercury poses to public health and the environment. We thank you for your consideration of this important issue.