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Contact:
Terri Goldberg 617-367-8558 x302
or tgoldberg@newmoa.org

Northeast States Form Clearinghouse to Promote Mercury Reduction

BOSTON – Environmental officials from eight Northeast states announced today that they have formed an umbrella organization – the Interstate Mercury Education and Reduction Clearinghouse (IMERC) – to assist their implementation of mercury reduction laws and programs aimed at getting mercury out of consumer products, the waste stream, and the environment.

Launched under the auspices of the Northeast Waste Management Officials' Association (NEWMOA), the new clearinghouse will coordinate regional mercury reduction efforts and assist state environmental agencies in developing and implementing specific legislation and programs for notification, labeling, collection, and eventual phase-out of products that contain mercury.

According to Commissioner Chris Recchia of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, “for several years all of the Environmental Agencies in the Northeast have been working aggressively to eliminate mercury from waste and products as part of a larger effort to reduce mercury in the environment. By forming IMERC, we are aiming to build on already successful efforts to reduce emissions from waste combustion facilities, collect and recycle mercury-added products, help hospitals and schools eliminate and safely manage stockpiled fever thermometers and elemental mercury, and educate the public.”

Mercury poses serious environmental problems in the Northeast, and exposure to mercury by breathing its fumes and eating mercury-contaminated fish can damage the nervous system, kidneys and immune system, especially in small children and the unborn. All of the Northeast states have fish advisories in place warning people, particularly pregnant women, to avoid or limit their consumption of certain types of fish due to contamination by mercury.

According to Dana Bisbee, Assistant Commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, “State agencies sometimes hear complaints from the public and industry about the lack of coordination among states that adopt similar regulations and programs. The states in the Northeast have made a major commitment to avoid this kind of problem by creating IMERC to facilitate interstate cooperation on mercury reduction programs. I believe that this will make it easier for industry to comply with the states' requirements and for the public to gain access to important information.”

Commissioner Martha Kirkpatrick of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection stated, “The first function of IMERC is to facilitate coordination on the notification that manufacturers must submit in Maine, New

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Hampshire, and Rhode Island on the mercury content of the products they produce. Having a central location for submitting this information and managing the data for all of the states will be critical to the success of mercury reduction programs in the region.”

“This interstate clearinghouse will play an integral role in the efforts being made by all Northeast states to minimize the health and environmental impacts of mercury,” said Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Director Jan Reitsma. “For many years, Rhode Island has been ahead of the curve on addressing mercury pollution, and is pleased to join other environmental agencies in the Northeast in this cooperative information and data management initiative.”

NEWMOA is a non-profit, non-partisan interstate association made up of environmental agency directors from the hazardous waste, solid waste, waste site cleanup, pollution prevention, and underground storage tank programs in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Its mission is to help states articulate, promote, and implement economically sound regional programs for the enhancement of environmental protection.

Reporters/Editors Note: Additional information about IMERC can be found on the Web at <http://www.newmoa.org/prevention/mercury/imerc.cfm>.

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