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Bill prohibits the sale, distribution, and transfer of elemental mercury; creates long-term storage solution

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– Today, under suspension of the rules, the House of Representatives passed S. 906, the “Mercury Export Ban Act,” legislation sponsored by Sen. Barak Obama (D-IL).

The legislation would amend the Toxic Substances Control Act to prohibit the sale and distribution of elemental mercury by Federal agencies and prohibit the export of elemental mercury from the United States effective January 1, 2013. The legislation is similar to H.R. 1534, the “Mercury Export Ban Act,” a bill that passed the Committee on Energy and Commerce and the House of Representatives last year.

“More than 3,000 lakes, rivers, and streams in the United States have fish consumption advisories for mercury,” said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), the Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. “Mercury is particularly dangerous to very young children and pregnant mothers. The legislation we are passing today will help assure consumers that the fish on their dining room tables will not expose them to this toxin.”

“As

much as one-third of the mercury air pollution entering the U.S. comes through the global air transport from Asia, and our legislation will eliminate a key source of that mercury,” said Rep. Tom Allen (D-ME), the author of H.R. 1534. “Much of the fish Americans eat, including tuna, comes from waters off the coast of Asia and from South America. Although Maine has enacted strict state legislation controlling mercury pollution, an advisory still warns Mainers not to eat or to limit their consumption of locally caught fish. Only federal law can control pollution resulting from atmospheric transport of mercury still in widespread use elsewhere in the world. Mainers deserve to know that they can safely eat fish, whether imported from abroad or caught in-state, without fear of toxic mercury contamination.”

Mercury

is a potent neurotoxin with long-term health risks, especially for children and developing fetuses. The most significant source of mercury exposure to people in the United States is ingestion of mercury-contaminated fish. A 2007 report from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on U.S. fish advisories shows that 48 States have issued advisories, covering more than 14 million lake acres and almost 890,000 river miles.

The legislation would create a long-term storage option for private sources of elemental mercury at a facility to be designated by the Secretary of Energy.

The legislation passed the House with overwhelming support, by a vote of 393 to 5, and will now be sent to the President’s desk for his signature.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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