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Testing Reveals Extreme Levels of Mercury in Dolphin Eaters at Taiji, Japan

Tests conducted by BlueVoice.org in concert with Elsa Nature Conservancy during the spring of 2008 on residents of the village of Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture, Japan revealed that people who eat dolphin meat exhibit extremely high levels of mercury and other heavy metals. The highest level found revealed a mercury level of 18.9 ppm in a man who eats dolphin to this day. A doctor who specializes in mercury toxicity advised this individual be immediately hospitalized.

While some Japanese standards state 2.18 – 6.9 ppm is a “reference level”, the United States Environmental Protection Agency sets 1.0 ppm of mercury as the highest safe level. Even that level may not be safe according to some authorities.

A second dolphin-eating individual showed a mercury level of 13.74 ppm. In our sample three Taiji citizens indicated they had given up eating dolphin meat a year or more ago. They still had mercury levels in the range of 7.2 to 7.9 ppm.

Comparative tests of non-dolphin eaters showed much lower levels of mercury ranging from 1.09 to 3.99 ppm.

The individual who presented the mercury level of 18.9 ppm also had a high level of lead – 5.6 ppm. That is five times the high end of the reference range. High levels of aluminum and arsenic were also found in some individuals who eat dolphin meat.

Dolphin meat has been repeatedly proven to be high in mercury, other heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants such as PCBs.

“BlueVoice calls on the regulatory agencies of Japan to initiate a system labeling dolphin meat accurately and applying a label warning consumers of the dangers of mercury and other contaminants in dolphin meat. Currently consumers of dolphin meat are exposed to dangerous levels of contamination without any knowledge of this fact” said BlueVoice executive director Hardy Jones.

Methylmercury (MeHg) has a major impact on the nervous system (especially in developing fetuses and small children). Mildest exposures produce

malaise, blurred vision, pins-and-needles tingling and memory impairment. More severe exposures lead to vision loss, diminished hearing, speech disorders, shaky movements and unsteady gaits. Very severe exposures produce mental derangement and coma, commonly resulting in death).

Prenatal/early childhood are the most vulnerable times to methylmercury poisoning, as this is a time of rapid brain development.

Mild Methylmercury exposure in pregnant women compromises a baby's developmental stages, producing neurological abnormalities.

Mercury is assimilated by the human body in the form of methylmercury, which is created from mercury by microorganisms. Methylmercury is ingested by fish and bio-concentrates through aquatic food chains, achieving highly magnified levels in top predatory animals. Marine mammals, including dolphins and whales are apex predators and show high concentrations of MeHg and other pollutants.

The mission of BlueVoice.org is to reverse the catastrophic decline in the vitality of the oceans and restore them to an abundant and pristine state capable of supporting thriving wildlife and a healthy and sustainable food source for humanity.

Our concern for whales and dolphins is both for their right to exist as living creatures in the ocean and as symbols and sentinels of the status of the oceans.

Our current emphasis is researching and making known the levels of pollution in the marine ecosystem that have contaminated much of the diminishing populations of fish by bio-concentrating toxins to the point where many large marine species have been declared to be toxic for human consumption. Our most important campaign today is researching and making known the connection between contaminated fish and clusters of cancer and hormonal disruption in humans.

Our most recent film, "The Dolphin Defender", premiered on PBS and is in international distribution.

BlueVoice.org has additional information in text and video:
<http://www.bluevoice.org>.

A DVD with a fifteen minute film, the full white paper in English and sections of the paper related to Japan translated into Japanese is available from BlueVoice.org.