

This Isn't a Pollutant to Trade

Sunday, January 14, 2007; Page B06

The Jan. 6 news story "Mercury 'Hot Spots' Identified in U.S. and Canada" raised a critical issue regarding mercury regulation. While some argue that the success of the sulfur dioxide emissions trading program is a model for mercury, there are major differences between the chemicals that undermine such a comparison. Most important, mercury is bioaccumulative. It builds up in wildlife, often to a million times its concentration in air or water, while sulfur dioxide does not. As a result, trading mercury credits is likely to continue to create "hot spots" such as those cited in the article. The only way to avoid the buildup of mercury in the environment is to reduce or stop releases.

Recognizing this, Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) has introduced a bill to eliminate an unnecessary source of mercury -- chlorine factories using outdated technology. With 90 percent of the industry using technology that releases no mercury, eight plants still release, on average, five times more mercury per plant than the average power plant.

Mr. Obama's bill would give these plants until 2012 to shift, as many already have, to mercury-free technology.

When dealing with mercury it's important to recognize its unique ability to build up in our food chain and not be tricked by comparisons to chemicals that don't.

MICHAEL F. HIRSHFIELD

*Chief Scientist and Senior Vice President
for North America*

Oceana

Washington

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/13/AR2007011300957.html?referrer=emailarticle>