POLLUTION HAS NO PLACE IN THE KITCHEN

Lead and mercury in baby food, tuna, spices and cookware make their way into kitchens all over the world and are extremely pervasive in certain countries or regions due to culinary customs. These neurotoxins particularly impact the development, health and life expectancy of children. For many years, Pure Earth has implemented solutions to prevent kitchen-related exposures and is scaling up this work to address newly identified sources.

POTTERY

According to Mexico's 2019 National health survey, 20 to 30% of the population of many states have elevated blood lead levels.

The primary source of exposure has been identified as lead in traditional glazed pottery which mixes with acidic foods–like coffee, chili peppers, tomatoes and lemons–-and quickly enters bodies' digestive systems and bloodstreams.

Making pottery is a livelihood that supports many indigenous families throughout Mexico and in other countries such as Peru and Bolivia.

Traditional lead-glazed pottery used in Mexican families households.

Solution: Pure Earth is currently implementing a multi-pronged strategy to assist potters to convert to a lead-free glaze and build their capacity to market their wares, build demand for and distribution of lead-free traditional pottery; educate the general public about the risks of lead exposure; monitor blood lead levels of people most at risk – potters and pregnant women and children; and coordinate with government agencies around monitoring and enforcing the ban to sell lead glaze.

TURMERIC AND OTHER SPICES

In countries including Bangladesh, India and Georgia, evidence revealed that manufacturers add lead to enhance the vibrant yellow color consumers identify with high quality spices, especially turmeric. Studies of turmeric have shown lead concentrations to exceed national limits by up to 500 times.

Lead-contaminated spices are sometimes exported to the United States.

Spices are a particular problem because the ill effects of lead exposure build up over time, and these spices are used in households every day in many countries.

Turmeric and paprika in a Georgian market.

Solution: Conduct rapid marketplace screenings to identify lead containing spices and identify interventions; work with Food and Safety authorities to review regulation and enforcement to prevent lead adulterated spices from reaching the marketplace; educate consumers on how to avoid contaminated products.

TUNA & OTHER SEAFOOD

Mercury contamination of seafood is a persistent public health threat that poses a significant risk to children and women of child-bearing age.

The leading cause of mercury pollution is small-scale artisanal gold mining, which releases mercury vapors that settle in soil and water where it can turn into methylmercury absorbed by fish.

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration warns pregnant women, and children to avoid eating swordfish, shark, tilefish, and king mackerel, and to limit their intake of tuna because of the high methylmercury levels found in these species.

Solution: Pure Earth has a comprehensive strategy: help miners go mercury-free; raise awareness about mercury poisoning; rehabilitate degraded ecosystems and rainforests; and develop market solutions and demand for responsibly-mined gold.

BABY FOOD

Released in February 2021, a government investigative report on baby foods revealed dangerous levels of toxic heavy metals, including lead, mercury, arsenic and cadmium.

The ingredients in baby food including rice, wheat, sweet potatoes, and leafy greens tend to absorb more heavy metals when cultivated in polluted soil or water.

Contaminated baby food exposes infants to toxins at a crucial time in their development; the damage lasts a lifetime.

Solution: Pure Earth supports the U.S. House Subcommittee's recommendations to increase FDA regulation of toxic heavy metals in baby foods; manufacturer compliance requirements; and mandatory consumer labels. Further, by cleaning up polluted air, water and soil that contaminate crops, we prevent dangerous toxins from entering the global food supply chain in the first place.