

Summary of closing comments by George Kuper, Council of Great Lakes Industries (CGLI)

We all know that mercury, and its methylation, is a complicated topic. The topic requires both a broad, systemic perspective as well as a more local understanding. My impression is that some of the presentations did not use the full range of facts available, particularly given the systemic nature of the challenge. Importantly, the presentations that demonstrated the importance of the form of mercury that we are talking about – relative to the impact it has in the environment – are the way this discussion should be conducted.

We need to de-emphasize the focus on total mercury. Otherwise, we will never get to an understanding of the issues and workable solutions.

- Several presentations suggest or show that atmospheric levels are going down as the result of lots of good work by many. That's an outcome that needs to be broadly understood, and therefore, made forcefully. It does not mean the job is done. It does show that we are in fact working on the problem and seeing some positive results.
- Now that the largest source of mercury – municipal and medical incinerators – are gone, we need to understand that there are multiple source types responsible for the remaining releases. We must not get hung up on just one of those sources. We should look at them all with a screen that includes impact on the eco-system and cost effectiveness.
- The models used to evaluate source and impacts are useful for guiding our discussions about these issues. But, to be effective the model results must track reality. We must continue to work on improving the models. Analysis of Mercury Deposition Network actual data, using 1996 as a base for man-made emissions and deposition, by 2008 we see approximately a 50 percent decline in emissions but only a 10 percent decline in deposition. This is with actual data as opposed to model results.
- The substantial increase in our understanding of the health implications of mercury exposure for both humans and the ecosystem is impressive. With that understanding is the responsibility to correctly communicate risks to populations. There is no need to overstate the risks. Overstating the issues does more to impede our progress than drive us toward solutions.
- We need to maintain a proper context and perspective on contamination from mercury. Several researchers told us while mercury is an important factor in Great Lakes Region's fish consumption advisories; mercury is not the only contaminant. For instance, in Ontario, for the general population, mercury was found to be only responsible for between 1 and 17 percent of advisories.
- Although it is difficult to do when pursuing research support, the substantial progress that has been made to date – as demonstrated repeatedly in this conference – needs to be trumpeted. We all need to know that we are actually making real reductions in fish and wildlife levels. And, apparently there are more reductions yet to come. We all need the encouragement in order to maintain the effort.

- The absence of an understanding, or even consideration, of the economy by this community is very disappointing. It is self-defeating as it limits the salability of remediation proposals to policy makers. The absence of economic understanding is partially the reason we have pursued an economically self-defeating policy of individual state-based product legislation, denying our manufacturers the benefit of our huge, standardized national market.
- When addressing mercury in products, responsibility for action is a collective responsibility. It is not just the manufacturer that should bear the burden alone as one participant in a value-added supply and use chain.

Looking to the future, I propose an action item:

- To the extent that this conference can inform decisions about research needs, the presentations should lead us toward research topics of most importance. I see from this a logical next assignment for the Great Lakes BiNational Toxics Strategy (GLBTS) Mercury Workgroup. Take the results of this conference and draft from it a research agenda for the Great Lakes Region. Perhaps future Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) RFPs could target items from that list to encourage work in these areas.

Thank you for the opportunity for industry representatives to participate in this conference. As Alexis described so well this morning, voluntary action can and has worked. If all the stakeholders are engaged in collectively defining the problem and identifying solutions, those solutions are very likely to be implemented more effectively than more traditional command and control regulation.

Finally, I hope that the substance presented at this conference will find its way into peer reviewed publications so that it can appropriately inform future research, policy, and action. Our collective response to date has not benefited from the sensationalism and politics that too often seem to trump scientifically based understanding. We clearly have the capacity to improve our record.