

A large, artistic splash of water is the background for the entire page. It features various droplets and streams of water, creating a dynamic and textured effect. The water is rendered in shades of gray and white, with some darker areas where the droplets are more concentrated.

FACT SHEET

Mercury Poisoning of the Grassy Narrows and White Dog Communities

Dr. Harada's Key Findings

The Grassy Narrows community has fought against the neglect of their Treaty rights, the forced removal of their children to residential schools, hydro damming, the relocation of their community, and the destruction of traditional hunting and trapping ground by industry giants. Now a newly translated Japanese study published in 2011 reveals that the disturbing health impacts of mercury poisoning on the health of Grassy Narrows people are still rampant fifty years after the contamination of their river began.

Point of Contamination:

Between 1962 and 1970 Dryden Chemicals Inc. part of the local paper mill, dumped 20,000 pounds of mercury into the Wabigoon River, with the Province's permission. [p. 56, Hutchison]

On April 6, 1970 the Canadian government shut down the local fishing industry. Within a year unemployment rates in Grassy Narrows sky rocketed from 5% to 95%. [Shkilnyk 1985: 199-202]

Health Canada's Response:

Health Canada conducted studies on the Residents of Grassy Narrows and White Dog to assess risk for mercury contamination over a 15 year period. By the 1990's 0% of patients examined were deemed at risk due to the levels of mercury in their system. At this time Health Canada issued a statement declaring that poisoning due to methyl mercury contamination in these communities was a "minimal risk."

Dr. Harada's Research:

Dr. Harada, a world renowned mercury poisoning specialist from Japan has studied the effects of mercury contamination on the two communities for over 35 years. In 1975 mercury levels in Dr. Harada's blood samples from the residents of Grassy Narrows averaged 46.37 ppb, the highest being 159 ppb. It was even higher in Whitedog, averaging 77.39 ppb (parts per billion) and the highest being 385 ppb. The Health Canada safety guideline is 50ppb. [Harada et al., 2005]

Quick Fact:

When mercury contaminated fish is consumed by humans, it is absorbed into the blood stream and attacks the central nervous system



Dr. Harada's Return in 2010

All of Dr. Harada's Grassy Narrows patients who indicated mercury levels higher than the safety guideline of 50 ppm in 1975 were deceased by 2004. [Harada et al., 2005]

Dr. Harada and his team tested 160 people in total. The report found that 59% of all people examined in 2010, had been affected by mercury. [Harada et al., 2011, 3.2]

Of those people aged 21-41 tested, 44% were affected by mercury poisoning, though none of them were alive when active dumping was active. [Harada et al., 2011, 3.3.4]

Minimata Disease:

A condition that arises from exposure of humans to methylmercury. Symptoms include:

- Loss of sensation in extremities
- Ataxia (loss of muscular coordination)
- Tremors
- Impaired hearing, speech
- Tunnel vision

“According to our findings, there should be no doubt that the sensory impairment is a result of methylmercury contamination.” [Harada et. Al, 2011, 2.2.3]

Other Findings:

In total, 74% of people impacted by mercury were NOT receiving any form of compensation. [Harada et al., 2011, 3.3.4]

Dr. Harada noted a marked rise in psychiatric symptoms, including depression, anxiety and self-injury. He explains: “It was characteristic of this round of investigation to see these eminent psychiatric symptoms. This was probably influenced in part by the prolonged course of incidence resolution and [frustration brought by] the lack of new acknowledgement [from the Canadian government].” [Harada et al., 2011, 3.3.3]

Resources:

Harada, M., et al., 2011. Mercury pollution in First Nations groups in Ontario, Canada: 35 years of Canadian Minamata disease. *Journal of Minamata Studies* 3: 3-30.

Harada, M., et al., “Research on Environmental Disruption” Vol. 34 No. 4 Spring 2005. [Long-term study on the effects of mercury contamination on two indigenous communities in Canada \(1975-2004\).](#)

Hutchinson, G. *Grassy Narrows*. 1977. Toronto

Shkilnyk, A. *A Poison Stronger Than Love: The Destruction on an Ojibwa Community*. 1985 (New Haven: Yale University Press).