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Health minister urged to assess risks of eating farmed salmon

January 8, 2001 - VANCOUVER - Federal Health Minister Allan Rock must immediately order wide-scale testing of farmed salmon produced in Canada in order to determine contaminant levels and the safety of regular human consumption of the fish, the David Suzuki Foundation said today.

Additionally, Minister Rock must ensure that his department and the Bureau of Food Safety and Consumer Protection publish information about safe-level standards for the consumption of farmed salmon by adults, especially pregnant women and nursing mothers, and children, said Jim Fulton, the Foundation's executive director.

"I have spent hours speaking to Health Canada officials and people from Food Safety and Consumer Protection and I wasn't able to get any assurance that such safe-level standards even exist in Canada never mind being accessible to the public," Mr. Fulton said.

Concern about contaminant levels was raised last week when research from Canada and Britain suggested that potentially dangerous levels of toxic chemicals are contained in the feed given to farmed salmon. The Canadian research was conducted by Dr. Michael Easton for the David Suzuki Foundation and in Britain by Dr. Miriam Jacobs of the University of Surrey in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The research was cited in a British Broadcasting Corporation television program aired Sunday. In the program, Dr. Nigel Harrison, a contaminants expert in Britain's Food Standards Agency, advised that adults should eat a maximum of one portion of farmed salmon a week because it may contain contaminants like Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs).

"In Britain and Europe, consumers can find out about safe-level standards for contaminants in oily fish like salmon and be told just how much is safe to eat. We have no such information readily available," Mr. Fulton said.

"We are asking Canada's Health Minister to come clean with Canadians and advise us about potential health hazards of regularly eating farmed salmon," he added.

"The federal government has been the lead promoter of salmon farming in Canada since 1984. My concern is that federal agencies have not vigorously researched the health or ecological impacts of salmon farming because the government itself is the main promoter of the industry."

Mr. Fulton has written to Minister Rock asking him to address this issue immediately.

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For more information, please call Jim Fulton or Jean Kavanagh at 604-732-4228, ext. 229.

