

# High fructose corn syrup's not-so-sweet surprise: mercury!

By IATP

January 26, 2009

There's been ongoing debate about the healthfulness of high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), but no one talked about mercury contamination. Until now, that is.

Two new reports issued today show that commercial HFCS is routinely contaminated with mercury, as are many foods and beverages where HFCS is a major ingredient. Read more about it at: [www.iatp.org](http://www.iatp.org).



One chemical critical for making HFCS is caustic soda. It used to be that nearly all caustic soda came from chlorine plants using something called mercury cell technology. Caustic soda from those plants, many of which are still operating, can be contaminated with mercury. Mercury-grade caustic soda can then contaminate the HFCS and other products made from it with mercury. Newer, mercury-free processes for making chlorine and caustic soda are available, and more efficient as well.

An environmental health officer with the [Food and Drug Administration](http://www.fda.gov) discovered the problem several years ago. She tested 20 samples of commercial HFCS and found mercury in about half of them (9/20). But then the FDA did nothing about it, apparently for years. Now retired from the FDA, she and co-authors published their findings today in the peer-reviewed journal, [Environmental Health](http://ehpnet1.niehs.nih.gov/docs/2008/116-12/116-12-1111.full.html)

Learning of the issue, the [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](http://www.iatp.org) went out and bought 55 kinds of soda pop and beverages, salad dressings, chocolate milk, barbecue sauce, yogurt and other items where HFCS was #1 or #2 on the label.

We found total mercury detectable in about a third of them. They include some of the most widely recognized brands in America, many of them marketed to children. Table A of our larger [report](http://www.iatp.org) gives the full list of what we found.

The good news is that in 2007, then-Senator Barack Obama [introduced a bill](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2007/07/26/obama-introduces-bill-to-phase-out-mercury-cell-technology) that would phase out mercury cell technology in chlorine plants. Let's hope he carries on that effort in the White House.

We also suggest that food companies stop buying their HFCS from plants still using outdated mercury cell technology, and that consumers stop buying their food products until they've done so.

This is a source of mercury we shouldn't have to put up with.