Scientists Predict Mercury in the Arctic Permafrost Will Be Released by Climate Change

Much has been made of the diseases that will be released once the world's ice has melted, but scientists have now raised a new concern: mercury. Published in Geophysical Research Letters, scientists found that mercury levels in permafrost soil are twice that of all other soils. An Arctic Council report predicts that 20 percent of the surface permafrost will melt by 2040, and large amounts of mercury will be released. The permafrost studied was taken from Alaska, and study co-author and scientist with the National Snow and Ice Data Center Kevin Schaefer says,

> *As permafrost thaws in the future, some portion of this mercury will get released into the environment, with unknown impact to people and our food supplies…"*

Mercury Buildup

This mercury is built up from before the last ice age, which will likely have effects we might not have thought of. Mercury exposure and poisoning can lead to mood swings, insomnia, headaches, pain, and tremors, while chronic mercury exposure can lead to the development of serious neurological issues. The neurotoxin has been phased out of objects like thermometers, light bulbs, dental amalgams, and most vaccines, but people are most commonly exposed to mercury through seafood.

Heavy Metals

The timeline for climate change leaves little wiggle room. Yet things like the release of the mercury in the permafrost aren’t necessarily being considered. This study estimates that this is the largest deposit of mercury in the world. Who knows where that will end up?

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Sources:

- *The Arctic is Full of Toxic Mercury and Climate Change is Going to Release it* – Organic Consumer’s Association
- *Permafrost Stores a Globally Significant Amount of Mercury* – AGU Publications
- *Melting permafrost in the Arctic is unlocking diseases and warping the landscape* – Vox