

SITE C CLEAN ENERGY PROJECT

INFORMATION SHEET

METHYLMERCURY

Mercury is found naturally in air, water, sediment, soil, plants, animals and fish. The creation of a new reservoir leads to the conversion of naturally occurring inorganic mercury in flooded soil and vegetation into methylmercury that can be absorbed by animals and people. To keep the levels of methylmercury to a minimum, mitigation measures in the construction of Site C include the removal of trees and vegetation in the reservoir area, and minimizing the disturbance of soils prior to reservoir filling.

As part of the environmental assessment process, BC Hydro commissioned studies on methylmercury in the Site C project area. The research found that background levels of mercury in the Site C project area are generally low, and that Peace River fish mercury levels are lower than the same or comparable species in other lakes and reservoirs in B.C., and among the lowest in Canada.

The research also identified that fish mercury levels in the reservoir will increase for a time, but the increase is predicted to be sufficiently low that it will not create risks to fish, wildlife or human health. Mercury levels in fish are expected to return to baseline levels within 15 to 25 years.



The changes in methylmercury levels from Site C are predicted to be sufficiently low that it will not create risks to fish, wildlife or human health.

With Site C, there are no changes anticipated to the consumption of locally caught fish as a result of the project. According to Health Canada, two servings of fish per week is part of a healthy diet.

The low levels of methylmercury from Site C are due to the low baseline levels of mercury, and the project's relatively small reservoir when compared to other hydroelectric facilities — Site C will rely on the existing Williston Reservoir for most of its water storage — and there will not be large volumes of standing water in contact with decaying vegetation to cause the accumulation of methylmercury.

As part of the environmental assessment process, a Joint Review Panel report included recommendations about methylmercury. The recommendations led to the environmental approval condition for BC Hydro to develop a Methylmercury Monitoring Plan in collaboration with the First Nations Health Authority and Aboriginal Groups.

Information about mercury levels in fish will be publicly reported by BC Hydro, including recommended consumption levels for types of fish.