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CONFERENCE ON INTOXICATION DUE TO
ALKLYMERCURY TREATED SEED

Baghdad, Iraq, 9-13 November 1974

CHEMICAL TYPE OF MERCURY IN PATIENTS IN THE OUTBREAK IN IRAQ

by

J. Crispin Smith, F. Farris and R. Von Burg
Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of
Rochester School of Medicine, Rochester, NY 14642, United States of America

A correct toxicological assessment of the outbreak in Iraq requires that the chemical form of mercury involved be known. The bulk of the analytical data from Iraq was obtained by atomic absorption spectrophotometry. This method measures total mercury and, selectively, inorganic mercury. A significant number of blood, hair, and post-mortem tissue samples were examined by a gas chromatographic procedure. It was shown that the non-inorganic mercury present could be accounted for as methylmercury. Although the inorganic mercury levels were also elevated, this form of mercury rarely accounted for more than 10% of the total mercury. No other organomercury compounds were detected in the human material. The samples examined were mainly from the provinces near Baghdad but some were from other areas of the country.

The outbreak in Iraq can be attributed to intoxication with methylmercury. Every effort should be made to discuss the toxicological relationships in terms of methylmercury concentrations.