

Minamata Disease Mystery Solved!

AP—After 14 year of the Minamata Mystery, the causal agent of Minamata Disease (MD) and the source of the contamination have finally been discovered.

Last month, researchers were able to replicate the symptoms of MD in cats. They determined that methyl mercury was the causal agent in this horrific disease that targets the nervous systems of victims. Questions still remained about the source of the contamination.

It had been confirmed that MD was caused by the consumption of fish, and thus the health of the Minamata Bay was in question. Investigations of all of the industries in the area were conducted, but no hard evidence was collected.

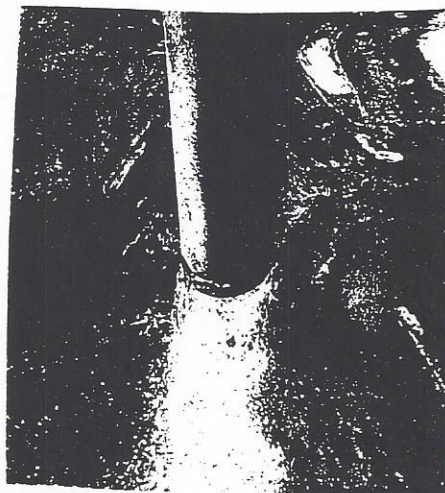
A second outbreak in Niigata was caused by a company manufacturing acetaldehyde. This finding led many to believe that the Chisso factory, a Minamata City acetaldehyde producer, was the source of the Minamata Bay contamination.

Researchers had been unable to determine if the methylmercury has originated from the Chisso factory until last week when researchers detected minute quantities in the mud near a discharge site. It has been discovered that for each ton of acetaldehyde produced, between 500 and 1000 grams of mercury catalyst were expended in the

wastewater. This inorganic mercury reacted in the wastewater and significant quantities of methylmercury were produced as a side reaction.

Both acetaldehyde and vinyl chloride are intermediates in the manufacture of plastics. The Chisso Company's production of plastics has increased exponentially since 1953 due to a booming plastic industry.

Both the company and the government are being questioned about why it has taken 14 years to solve this mystery. Many are accusing the government of sacrificing its citizens for economic gain. While the accusations fly, the victims continue to seek adequate compensation for their suffering.



Discharge Pipe from Chisso Factory, Minamata Bay