

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 29, 2021

Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC 20201

Michael S. Regan
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Secretary Becerra and Administrator Regan,

Thank you for your public service. Recent research from the Marine Mammal Center shows a startling increase in cancer in sea lions along the California coast. Researchers believe this increase may be attributable to the presence of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) leaking into the ocean, which affects the food supply that sea lions consume. The Southern California coast was previously used as a DDT dumping ground.¹ Humans can also eat the same seafood that sea lions do, and the obvious question is if DDT is indeed causing a spike in cancer in sea lions, is this DDT also causing a spike in cancer in humans? We ask your agencies to take the actions necessary to answer that critical health question.

The Marine Mammal Center headquartered in Sausalito, California, is the largest marine mammal hospital in the world and is a global leader in marine mammal health and disease investigation. Scientists at the Center have found alarming increases of urogenital carcinoma in sea lions. There are several factors that may lead to the development of cancer in sea lions. One factor, however, deserves heightened attention. Persistent organic pollutants – and DDT in particular – have been heavily linked to urogenital cancer. In humans, for example, reproductive tract cancer is associated with higher exposure to pollutants, and exposure to DDT increases the risk for cancer later in life.

Pollutants like DDT can be transported up the food chain from sediments, to invertebrates, to fish, and then to top predators like sea lions. Cancer can be developed through the sea lions' consumption of fish in Southern California. This contaminated fish can also be consumed by humans in California and shipped to other parts of our country.

If sea lions are developing cancer at alarming levels due, in part, to their diet, does that present a danger for the human population who are consuming the same fish from the same contaminated waters? In the short term, we request that your agencies take action to answer this critical question as soon as possible. For the long term, we urge more investment into research and studies that will unlock our understanding of risks and disease manifestations from pollutants in our oceans.

Thank you for your attention to this important health matter.

Sincerely,



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

¹ Rosanna Xia, "How the waters off Catalina became a DDT dumping ground," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 2020.



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Alan Lowenthal
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Ro Khanna
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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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