Are you aware that mercury exposure in humans is listed as one of the top 10 environmental problems we face today? If you find this shocking, you are not alone. Nature can produce some of the most beautiful and breathtaking sights imaginable, but at the same time it can be a volatile system, hiding dangers behind closed doors. From birth defects to full blown cancer, this is not a problem we can brush under a until it goes away. As with many other ecological disasters, humans are the root cause of the problem, and we must also be the ones to correct our messes.

Millions of people are completely naive to the fact that they are consuming mercury in one form or another, probably on a daily basis. They are also unaware of the dangers of mercury exposure. A compound known as Methylmercury is the main cause of trouble. This is nothing more than the organic form of what chemists call the periodic element of mercury. This form of the element is easily passed through plants and animals and accounts for most of the poisonings. You may be wondering how this compound worked its way into our environment, and why it is coming back to harm us. The answer is relatively simple, and may shock you: pollution from sloppy industrial processes. Some exposure comes from a broken mercury thermometer, barometer, or some other device containing the substance, but that only accounts for a minute percentage of exposures. Our main concern is the consumption of fish and shellfish that contain mercury. The contamination is traceable back to our messy habit of producing goods in an unsafe manner. By dumping our toxic sludge into rivers, unlined landfills, pits in the ground and other unsafe places of disposal chemicals will leech into the surrounding environment. This mercury was either directly dumped into our waterways or it seeped into them over time. Once it works its way into the aquatic ecosystem, the poison can accumulate in fish. As a species that frequently consumes fish, we are bringing these poisons into our bodies and our health is waning because of our carelessness.

The negative health impacts are numerous and include neurological disorders, light to severe birth defects, and cancer if exposure is prolonged. A mother carrying an unborn child can poison the unborn without even knowing it. She can eat shellfish, and in most cases the blood content of the substance will be low enough that there will not be any adverse health effects. While the mother has no symptoms of exposure whatsoever, the child still has the possibility of being born with neurological disorders.

Just because someone has no symptoms of the poisoning does not mean they are out of hot water. Having moderate but not immediately dangerous levels of the organic compound in your body will affect you in the long run. If a lot of seafood is consumed regularly it will significantly raise your chance of getting certain cancers. The compound we are polluting our environment with is on an angry rampage and the problem is not about to get better any time soon, even if we try to fix what we have broken.

What can we do about this looming problem? Long story short, not much. We can prevent the further progression of the epidemic of contamination, but it will be very costly and time consuming to prevent the current contamination from spreading. The main source of contamination is improperly disposed materials on private property. It would be physically impossible to clean up every one of these sites, but the government is working to clean up major industrial sites according www.epa.gov/hg . In addition to properly disposing of anything hazardous, if you are aware of a company or individual dumping waste illegally, now is a good time to intervene. There is power in numbers and I bet you will find many people who share your passion for protecting our home.

Throughout the past several decades, illegal dumping of toxic waste has been a huge problem, and though it is improving the effects are still visible. We may not be able to stop the progression of this disaster, but it is possible to save the future. The next time you are enjoying seafood sit back and remember what you are ingesting as the health effects can be grim at best. I am not saying to stop consuming seafood altogether, but I am saying to watch the quantity. If you are a lover of seafood and this recommendation upsets you, use this frustration to step up and make a difference.