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### In Support of LD 1664 ("An Act To Limit Mercury Emissions from Crematoria")

#### Testimony at the Maine Legislature

Tuesday May 17th, 2005

by Matt Prindiville, NRCM outreach coordinator

Good afternoon Senator Cowger, Representative Koffman and members of the Natural Resources Committee. My name is Matt Prindiville. I am Outreach Coordinator for the Toxics Project at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM).

NRCM supports LD 1664 and its goal of achieving controls over mercury emissions from crematoria.

Two sets of facts make cremation a significant source of mercury to the environment.

First, there is a large and still growing reservoir of mercury in the mouths of Maine citizens. As was discussed during hearings on LD 1327 and LD 1338, dentistry continues to use mercury in amalgam fillings that some dentists continue to believe is essential to best dental practices. Approximately 100 million amalgams are placed in patients' teeth each year by 175,000 U.S. dentists.[1] This annual mercury input as well as the more mercury-intensive historic practices, gives us a big mercury legacy in teeth. It is estimated that there are currently over 1,000 tons of mercury in the mouths of U.S. residents--more than half of all mercury currently in use in all products.[2]

The second part of the equation is the growth in the practice of cremation. Essentially all of the mercury that goes into a crematorium comes out in air emissions. Crematories in Maine, as elsewhere, typically lack pollution control technology to capture mercury vapors[3]. Currently, there are no emission limits imposed on crematories in the United States. However, Great Britain and other countries in the EU have adopted regulations to require mercury emission controls. Maine DEP estimates the loading of the environment by mercury from Maine crematories at 20 pounds per year. This figure is arrived at by multiplying the 6,000 cremations reported by the industry to take place in Maine each year by EPA's estimate of 1.49 grams of mercury per body. Estimates differ -- the EU puts the figure at 2.5 grams per body -- and the figure of 20 pounds per year is as likely to be an underestimate as it is to be too high.

There are important environmental reasons to eliminate or drastically reduce mercury emissions from crematories. Policymakers in Maine are well aware of the unfortunate effects that the use of mercury has had on our environment. In recent years, this Committee has led efforts to reverse the problem. But the job is not finished. Due to unsafe mercury levels, Maine's Bureau of Health maintains strict fish consumption advisories for most of the

fresh water fish found in Maine's lakes, rivers and streams.

All evidence continues to support the commitment this state and others in the region have made to achieve virtual elimination of mercury pollution to our environment. Achieving that goal will require that we effectively control the substantial mercury emissions from cremation.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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[1] Water Environment Federation, "Controlling Dental Facility Discharges in Wastewater, Alexandria, VA," 1999; King County Department of Natural Resources, "Management of Hazardous Dental Wastes in King County, 1991 - 2000," Hazardous Waste Management Program, Water and Land Resources Division, 2000.

[2]U.S. E.P.A, Int'l Mercury Market Study and the Role and Impact of US Environmental Policy, 2004.

[3] USEPA. 1997. Mercury Study Report to Congress. Volume II: An Inventory of Anthropogenic Mercury Emissions in the United States. PP. 4-28, 4-36.

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