

Press release



For immediate release

Inuit Representatives and Université Laval Scientists Join Forces to Protect Traditional Foods from "Forever Chemicals" and Fight Environmental Injustices

Québec City, January 25, 2022 – Inuit representatives and scientists from Université Laval will attend the 17th meeting of the Stockholm Convention's Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee, which runs until January 28. Armed with the latest data from the Nunavik Inuit Health Survey Qanuilirpitaa? 2017 and the Pregnancy Wellness with Country Foods project, they will support Canada's proposal to regulate certain types of chemicals called PFAS – better known as "forever chemicals" –, a group of substances widely used to manufacture various everyday products and which affect traditional Inuit foods.

PFAS (short for perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are manmade chemicals used in many products such as water and stain repellents. Because they are extremely persistent and linger in the environment for a very long time, they have been dubbed "forever chemicals". These environmental contaminants are carried by the oceans and air currents to the North where they land and accumulate in the wildlife that is crucial to Inuit diet, culture and lifestyle. High concentration of these chemicals was found in wildlife species eaten by Inuit as their traditional foods.

While some prevalent PFAS have been regulated and their levels are declining in the Arctic environment, other unregulated PFAS have been increasing in the Arctic populations and wildlife. In the Qanuilirpitaa? 2017 Nunavik Inuit Health Survey, scientists supported by the Northern Contaminants Program detected PFAS concentrations 4 to 7 times higher than in the general Canadian population. Elevated exposure to PFAS is associated with an increasing number of health problems in various populations including impacts on immune, hormonal, reproductive and metabolic systems.

"Wildlife is highly connected to Inuit health and well-being and it is important to us to protect that resource so it can be preserved for the next generations," says Minnie Grey, Executive Director of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS). Lucy Grey (Makivik Corporation, Nunavik), Kitty Gordon (NRBHSS), Eva Kruemmel (Canadian representative of the Inuit Circumpolar Council), Mélanie Lemire and Amira Aker (Université Laval and CHU de Québec-Université Laval Research Centre) will jointly advocate for PFAS-free environments in the Arctic.

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