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**Last Edition**

[Rudolph "Tuba" Smith, 35, back in police custody and remanded on rape charge](#)  
 • Last week, police said that a previously convicted thief, Rudolph "Tuba" Smith, 35, of Hattieville, Belze District, was wanted by the CIB, Belze City, for a rape investigation. We understand that Smith had recently been released from prison on bail for attempted rape.

[Taxi operator murdered in San Antonio](#)  
 • Dominicio Quixchan, 45, was a father of 5 and a husband for 15 years... On

**Amandala Weekly Poll**

**With the Ashcroft group taking the Port of Belize and Belize Port Limited into receivership, should government proceed to nationalize the Port, as it did with Belize Telemedia Limited?**

Yes  
 No

# FEATURES

## Mercury in Macal bay snook "very alarming," says Candy Gonzalez

Excellent!  Rating: ★★★★★ 5 / 5 (1 votes)

Posted: 04/05/2010 - 02:19 PM  
 Author: Adele Ramos - adelescribe@gmail.com

There is no public advisory out; however, recently unveiled data on mercury levels in fish of the Macal River has one environmentalist and activist concerned that the community may be eating itself to poor health without knowing it.

Candy Gonzalez of Belize Environmental Law and Policy Office (BELPO) noted that the issue was addressed in a meeting last Thursday, April 29, in San Ignacio Town. That meeting was jointly convened by the Belize Electric Company Limited (BECOL), the Public Health Department, and the Department of the Environment.

John Bodden, Senior Public Health Officer, who *Amandala* is informed is out of the country this week, gave a presentation on mercury levels in fish which, in Gonzalez's point of view is "very alarming."

"He stated that they took one survey of fish in the Macal in 2007, 2 in 2008 and 3 in 2009. In 2008, the level of mercury found was 1.7. In 2009, the results were 1.55, 1.26 and 1.6," said Gonzalez. "According to the WHO standard, it is safe to consume .5 ug/g but if it is methyl mercury, the danger comes at 0.3. Using either figure, the fish contain over 3 times the acceptable amount of mercury."

When *Amandala* contacted local public health officials in San Ignacio regarding the issue of mercury content of the fish, we were advised that they were not invited to the meeting and do not have the data. The official also said that they have not received much queries from the public on this issue. We were also informed that there is no public advisory in effect.

Further reporting on last Thursday's meeting, Gonzalez said: "Someone from the audience mentioned that children should not eat fish and he [Bodden] said, 'No.' ... His warning was to limit the amount of fish. He said that WHO [World Health Organization] would say it was okay for a 150 lb person to eat 2.3 oz of fish per week."

She points out that high mercury levels could cause damage to the central nervous system and is especially more dangerous for pregnant and nursing mothers and for young children.

Chief Environmental Officer, Martin Alegria, confirmed that the mercury levels were above the environmentally safe levels in a specific type of fish. However, *Amandala* understands that health officials took the decision not to publicize the results.

**SPORTS, SIN AND SUBVERSION**

**EVAN X HYDE**

**Calendar**

The DOE Chief claims that levels are not as bad now as 2008/2009. To this, Gonzalez responded: "Mercury accumulates in the body; shouldn't we be concerned about the amount of mercury that has accumulated in people over 2008/2009? On Thursday, I do not recall any mention of test results for 2010. One of the three tests done in 2009 was supposedly done in December."

According to Alegria, increased mercury levels were expected to peak five years after the impoundment of the Macal River to construct the hydro-electric facilities owned and operated by the Belize Electric Company Limited (BECOL). The year 2009 would have made the 5th year, he noted.

Citing Dr. Mark Chernaik, ELAW Staff Scientist, Gonzalez notes the data available since 2006: "...the results showing mercury levels averaging 0.53 ug/g *Petenia splendida* are alarming. ...the average levels of mercury in *Petenia splendida* [bay snook] from the lower reaches of the Macal River are four to five times the average mercury levels in predatory fish, indicating a mercury contamination problem."

Lab results for heavy metals received last October to test drinking water from the area did not confirm the presence of mercury, but did confirm the presence of aluminum, iron, lead, and manganese. Mercury and certain other heavy metals have been implicated for neurological damage, cancer, and kidney disease.

*Amandala* also tried to reach Stephen Usher, BECOL's vice president of operations and public relations contact; however, we did not receive a response.

We also tried to reach Fisheries Officer, Wilfredo Pott, who attends to the sampling of the fish, but when we called the office, we were advised that he was not in for the day.

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