

# Mercury in the Environment: Where Does It Come From?

**Prof. Daniel J. Jacob**

**Harvard University**

Vasco McCoy Family Professor of  
Atmospheric Chemistry and Environmental Engineering



Human exposure to mercury from fish consumption is a major public health problem worldwide. Mercury is a natural element that volatilizes to the atmosphere, is transported within the atmosphere on a global scale, and is eventually deposited to the surface. Human activity has greatly increased the source of mercury to the atmosphere over the past centuries through silver and gold mining, release from commercial products, and coal combustion. When deposited to the ocean, mercury enters the food chain and bio-accumulates in large predator fish consumed by humans. Mercury also cycles between the atmosphere, the land, and the ocean, and never actually goes away. As a result, much of the mercury presently in the environment may come from emissions more than a century ago. Mercury is now in general decline as a result of vigorous international efforts to decrease its emissions. It may still take centuries for mercury in the surface ocean to return to natural levels. In the meantime, climate change may cause large quantities of mercury presently stocked in soils to be released to the atmosphere and from there transferred to the ocean.



**11 January 2017**



**5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.**



**L1, Science Centre,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

**Light refreshments** will be served at 4:40 p.m.

**ENQUIRIES** 39439624  
essc@cuhk.edu.hk



**All are Welcome!**  
**Resigter NOW**