

Press Release

June 9, 2006

SCHAKOWSKY, RUSH ASK IL DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH TO BAN CARBON MONOXIDE FROM MEAT AND FISH PACKAGING

Use of carbon monoxide misleads consumers to think meat is fresh long after it has spoiled

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Representatives and Chicago delegation members Jan Schakowsky and Bobby L. Rush joined with fellow House Energy and Commerce Committee members John Dingell (D-MI), Henry Waxman (D-CA), Ed Markey (D-MA), and Bart Stupak (D-MI) in sending a letter to the Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health asking that he prohibit the sale of meat and fish products treated with carbon monoxide. Schakowsky is the ranking member on the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection. Rush, a senior member of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, also serves on the Subcommittee on Health.

First broken by WMAQ in Chicago, the meat and fish industries have recently begun using carbon monoxide in their packaging to preserve the coloration of meat and fish long after the products have expired. This practice could easily deceive consumers. In a March 6 editorial, the Tribune noted that "appearance - especially color - is the number one factor in selecting a package of meat," and that this practice "smacks of deceptive marketing." The Chicago City Council is considering a ban on using carbon monoxide in meat packaging.

"The meat and fish industries are using scientific tricks to push spoiled products on consumers. For busy moms and speed shoppers, the color of meat and fish is the first

indicator that the product is okay to eat," said Representative Jan Schakowsky, whose career as a consumer advocate began by winning a fight to require freshness date labeling on food. "Carbon monoxide does nothing to preserve food; instead, it disguises spoiled food to make consumers think it's fresh. It should be banned from meat and fish packaging."

"Many of my constituents already disproportionately suffer from the lack of access to fresh produce and meat," said Rush, "and to knowingly allow the meat and fish industries to treat their products with carbon monoxide as a means to preserve coloring is a deceptive practice that must be ceased immediately. This tactic, along with misleading labeling poses severe health risks and is nothing more than predatory behavior on the people we are charged to protect."

A full copy of the letter to Eric Whitaker, the Director of the Illinois Department of Health, is below:

Dear Director Whitaker,

We are writing to ask you to use your authority to prevent the sale of meat and fish products treated with carbon monoxide (CO). Alternatively, we ask that you ensure that labeling for such products include a very clear and protective "use or freeze by" date, and that consumers are aware that they cannot rely on product color to determine the safety of meat or fish at retailers that carry such products. We understand that the expiration dates on some of these potentially dangerous products are illegible and the dates themselves may not provide adequate protection against toxins (studies vary widely).

By letters dated February 9, 2006, and March 30, 2006 (attached), we requested that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Drug Administration remove meat treated with carbon monoxide from the market until industry claims that such products were safe could be assessed through a public notice and comment hearing procedure as required by law. Those letters and their attachments document the risk to Americans from meat and fish treated with carbon monoxide to prevent the deterioration in color that consumers rely upon to determine whether or not such products are wholesome.

We understand that many large grocery stores, as well as many smaller independent stores and butcher shops, refuse to carry such products. But where these products are sold, consumers are at risk and could use your help.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact David Nelson of the Committee on Energy and Commerce Democratic staff at 202-226-3400.

Sincerely,

JAN SCHAKOWSKY

BOBBY L. RUSH

JOHN D. DINGELL

HENRY A. WAXMAN

BART STUPAK

EDWARD J. MARKEY

**cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**The Honorable Ed Whitfield, Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**