



Second utility to cut mercury pollution from coal-fired plants

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CHICAGO - A second utility serving Illinois has struck a deal with the Blagojevich administration calling for drastic cuts in mercury emissions from its coal-fired plants.

Houston-based Dynegy agreed Monday to go beyond federal regulations and cut mercury emissions 90 percent by 2015. Federal rules would require a 70 percent reduction by 2018.

Dynegy has also agreed to cut smoke-stack exhaust, a source of smog and soot, at its five coal plants.

"We are committed to improving the environment while maintaining a reliable supply of electricity for our customers," said Dynegy spokesman David Byford.

The deal is similar to one brokered by the Blagojevich administration with St. Louis-based Ameren earlier this month. Officials hope the agreements will encourage a third large utility, Midwest Generation, to make a similar pledge.

Midwest Generation spokesman Doug McFarlan said the company is negotiating with state officials.

Dynegy has pledged to spend \$118 million on equipment that cuts both mercury emissions and sulfur dioxide pollution at its plants in Baldwin, Havana, Hennepin, Oakwood and Alton.

That's in addition to \$675 million the company agreed last year to spend on equipment to curb nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide emissions as part of a federal settlement. The settlement involves its plant in Baldwin, outside of St. Louis.

"This is significant action in a state that relies heavily on coal to generate electricity," said Doug Scott, director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich and other officials in a handful of states have been pushing mercury emission control plans that would be tougher than the one proposed by the federal EPA. His proposal would require utilities to reduce emissions at all facilities by an average of 90 percent in three years.

This month's agreements will give both Ameren and Dynegy more time to reach the target.

Mercury enters lakes and streams through rain and snow, where it concentrates in fish. Humans, especially women of childbearing age, pregnant women and young children, are at the greatest risk of damage to the nervous system.