



UNHEALTHY EMISSIONS MUST STOP

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There's so much mercury in some fish that pregnant women are advised to not eat a single can of tuna fish. That's because mercury interferes with the normal development of the brain and nervous system. Swordfish and halibut are very high in mercury, too.

It took a long time for things to get this far out of hand. There are many factors that caused us to be in this situation now. No one is blameless. Europe and the United States started the problem, but China is the major contributor to the problem today.

Where did all the unwanted mercury come from? Most of it is released into the air as waste when we burn coal. It falls to the ground and is washed into rivers and ultimately ends up in the ocean. Plants absorb it, and fish ingest it. Ultimately so do we.

By far, most coal is burned by electric power plants. That's good, not bad. Coal is an abundant natural resource in the United States. Burning coal for electric power is one way we can reduce our dependency on foreign energy sources. After all, the need for electric power is not going away.

But, we don't need to accept mercury as a by-product of electricity made from coal. There is technology available today to limit the release of most mercury from power plants. Sulfur dioxide, another dangerous pollutant, can be reduced as well.

In fact, two of Illinois electric power producers, Ameren and Dynegy, have already reached agreement with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to do just that. Midwest Generation has not reached agreement with the state to reduce its release of these pollutants. It is the third major coal-burning player in Illinois yet to do so.

We applaud the leadership of Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich and the Illinois EPA for successfully raising the standard, and we praise Ameren and Dynegy for accepting their environmental responsibilities.

It's time for Midwest Generation, which operates plants in Joliet and in Romeoville, to catch up and get with the program.

Before a tuna salad sandwich becomes something our grandchildren know nothing about.

— The Herald News