



Pollution controls needed to protect health

By Maureen Headington

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While the president of the Illinois AFL-CIO, Margaret Blackshere, goes to bat for polluters, ("Proposed mercury rule threatens jobs, families without clear benefit," July 27 Daily Southtown), Illinois cannot afford to sit idly by while other states are stepping up to do the right thing, imposing stiff regulations with meaningful timelines on mercury pollution from old coal-fired power plants.

President Bush inherited from the Clinton Administration an agenda to clean up 90 percent of toxic mercury by 2009. Bush relaxed this goal to a 70 percent cleanup by 2018. Ten states — California, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Vermont, New Jersey and Wisconsin have filed a lawsuit against the federal government challenging new regulations they say fail to protect children and expectant mothers from dangers posed by mercury emissions from power plants. Ms. Blackshere erroneously refers to " ... unrealistic, Illinois-only regulations," which is simply untrue.

In fact, nine states are currently in the process of implementing their own strict mercury regulations that truly protect public health.

Old coal plants have hidden behind a "grandfathered" status for over 35 years, enjoying a lesser air quality standard than modern power plants, even though they are the single largest source of industrial air pollution in our state.

Ms. Blackshere does not mention that Midwest Generation, the owner of six old coal plants serving metro Chicago, has doled out nearly half a million dollars in campaign contributions ... to maintain the status quo? Nowhere does she mention that these six old coal plants exceeded even the relaxed standard afforded them under their "grandfathered" status by 4,311 times during an 18-month period from Jan. 2 to June 3.

Ms Blackshere apparently fears change, ignoring updated greener technologies that are far kinder to human health and in the process would create new jobs replacing the outdated technology of the 1970's.

The citizens of Illinois deserve better. The dangers of power plant pollution are very real: Cancer-causing dioxin is unsafe at any level. Soot, or particulate matter, exacerbates heart attacks, lung disease and asthma attacks. Heavy metals such as toxic mercury cause brain

damage and neurological disorders. Autism is at epidemic proportions in this country, and along with Parkinson's Disease and Alzheimer's, are neurological disorders linked to heavy metals.

With one in six Illinois women having mercury levels high enough to cause potential damage to an unborn fetus, and with Illinois' lakes, rivers and streams posted with warnings not to consume fish from our waterways, Illinois should move full steam ahead and implement the rule that has been proposed — 90 percent cleanup by 2009.

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