

# Daily Herald

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## Vital plan to curb mercury pollution

Sadly, Illinois ranks fourth in the nation for local "hot spots" of concentrated mercury pollution. Pollution from nearby coal plants is poisoning our Great Lakes and waterways and threatening the health of children born to women who consume mercury-contaminated fish. A plan announced this week by Gov. Blagojevich would begin to reverse this terrible record by requiring coal plants to install modern technologies that will reduce their mercury pollution by 90 percent or more by 2009.

We know what the health problems are. Mercury is a neurotoxin. It can pass through a pregnant woman's placenta and cause harm to fetal brain development.

We know coal plants are the single largest source of mercury pollution, which gets into lakes, rivers and streams and proceeds up the food chain into fish. Estimates are that 6 to 10 percent of women of childbearing age have mercury levels high enough to put a fetus at increased risk for developmental problems.

This also creates extra costs for our health care and educational systems. Gov. Blagojevich's plan will make Illinois a national leader in curbing mercury pollution by requiring coal plants to install readily available, affordable technology.

Combined with measures under way in other Midwestern states, it will go a long way toward reducing mercury in the Great Lakes and our inland waterways. Moreover, it will help lower the mercury exposure of more than 100,000 women of childbearing age in Illinois who currently have mercury levels high enough to put their developing children at increased risk.

By investing now to reduce mercury pollution, we can protect the health of future Illinoisans and reduce the costs of mercury exposure that otherwise will burden the state's economy for years to come.

We call on the owners of Illinois coal plants to work with the governor and state regulatory agencies to ensure that this critical measure is implemented in a timely and effective manner.

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