



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

Illinois Indiana Michigan Minnesota Ohio Wisconsin

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Press Statement by Howard A. Learner Executive Director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center on Governor Blagojevich's Plan to Reduce Mercury Pollution

Governor Blagojevich's mercury reduction plan is a home run. It will protect our children's health and environment by eliminating 90 percent or more of the mercury pollution from Illinois coal plants. We commend the Governor on moving forward to make Illinois a national leader in stopping mercury pollution by requiring coal plants to install modern pollution control technology to protect our public health and the Great Lakes.

Illinois has the 4th highest number of mercury "hot spots" in the nation. Let's do something about it now. The Governor's plan will fill the gap left by the Bush Administration, which requires too little mercury pollution reduction, too late.

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

We know that coal plants are the largest source of the mercury pollution, which gets into our lakes, rivers and streams and goes up the food chain into fish. The Illinois Department of Public Health has issued "fish advisories" warning everyone – especially pregnant women and women of childbearing ages – to severely limit their consumption of fish from Illinois' rivers, inland lakes and Lake Michigan.

Sad, isn't it? Fish we catch in Lake Michigan and Illinois' rivers and lakes are not safe to eat.

How bad is the problem? Estimates are that 6%-10% of women in child-bearing ages have a mercury level high enough to put a fetus at an increased risk for developmental problems, which can burden a child throughout life by limiting opportunities. They also create extra costs for the health care and education systems. A recent study by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine concluded that the U.S. could lose \$8.7 billion annually in unrealized earnings due to reductions in intelligence from mercury pollution – far greater than the costs of reducing mercury pollution at the source.

We know that modern pollution control equipment can eliminate most of the mercury pollution from the coal plants. This technology is available, affordable and in use in other states to achieve a 90% reduction in mercury pollution from coal plants. Indeed, here in Illinois, Dynegy is moving to install mercury pollution control technology at its Vermillion coal plant near Danville by 2007, though not at its other plants.

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By investing now to reduce mercury pollution from coal plants, we can protect the health and well being of Illinois children and reduce the costs of mercury exposure that otherwise will burden people's lives and the state's economy for years to come.

We call upon the out-of-state energy companies owning coal plants in Illinois to be socially responsible corporate citizens by supporting – rather than showing knee-jerk opposition – to this important plan to protect our children's health and the Great Lakes.

We encourage Illinois residents who want to learn more about this issue to visit www.stopmercurypollution.org.

We commend the Governor on his leadership, and all of us look forward to working with the Illinois EPA and Illinois Pollution Control Board, as well as our state legislators, to implement these strong standards in a timely and effective manner. Let's move forward together to protect our children and environment. Thank you.

For more information, please visit -- www.stopmercurypollution.org

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