



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

Illinois Indiana Michigan Minnesota Ohio Wisconsin

BUSINESS LEADERS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

December 22, 2005

The Honorable Rod Blagojevich
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Dear Governor Blagojevich:

As business leaders, we believe a robust economy and healthy environment go hand in hand. Our shareholders, employees and customers expect us to conduct business in an environmentally responsible manner. Moreover, Illinois residents of the cities and towns where we operate have a right to healthy communities.

That's why we urge you to expand your commitment to environmental issues by taking action to reduce Illinois residents' exposure to mercury. Mercury long has been linked to serious health problems, most notably neurological development. As governor, you can protect Illinoisans -- especially children -- from the threats of mercury by:

- Adopting a stricter cap on mercury pollution from Illinois coal plants than the current federal government's weak requirement; and
- Prohibiting out-of-state trading of mercury pollution credits that can result in the continuation of dangerous mercury "hot spots" in Illinois communities.

The Illinois economy depends on a healthy, competitive workforce. By compromising the health and cognitive skills of future workers, mercury pollution threatens the ability of Illinois businesses to recruit the best and brightest workers needed to compete in the global marketplace. Productivity also can suffer when working parents of children with learning disabilities and cognitive problems are distracted or forced to take time off to seek care and services for their children.

So reducing mercury pollution isn't simply about doing the right thing for our current and future workers and their families. It's about keeping Illinois businesses competitive and the state's economy strong well into the future.

Unfortunately, the new federal “Clean Air Mercury Rule” does not provide an adequate level of protection from the immediate and long-term health effects of mercury exposure. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s own Inspector General has critiqued the Bush administration’s new rule for being developed without fully assessing the impact on children’s health. Furthermore, the rule’s “cap-and-trade” program could create and perpetuate mercury “hot spots” in Illinois if coal plants are allowed to continue to purchase the right to keep polluting at high levels, rather than install mercury pollution controls to clean up their plants.

Despite its shortcomings, the rule gives states an opportunity to address localized mercury pollution problems by adopting stricter standards and opting out of the national cap-and-trade program. Stricter controls on mercury pollution from coal plants will benefit Illinois businesses and families because mercury emissions settle locally. According to the EPA’s own modeling, 63 percent of mercury deposition at one Chicago location came from Illinois sources, and 41 percent of all Illinois mercury pollution likely falls within the state’s borders.

In our role as business leaders, we understand our shareholders and the communities we serve demand environmental responsibility. But we are also Illinois residents and parents, and have a direct interest in the quality of the state’s natural resources.

We commend your past environmental initiatives and urge you to act to reduce mercury pollution from coal plants in Illinois. By investing now to reduce mercury pollution we can protect the health and well being of Illinois children – our future workforce – and reduce the costs of mercury exposure that can burden our state’s economy for years to come.

We look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

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