



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

Illinois Indiana Michigan Minnesota Ohio Wisconsin

CHILDREN'S ADVOCATES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

December 22, 2005

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

Dear Governor Blagojevich:

Congratulations on the recent passage of your All Kids health insurance program. As advocates working to ensure a better, healthier future for Illinois children, we believe all kids deserve an environment that provides an opportunity to succeed. Your leadership on this and other issues is much appreciated and we look forward to continuing to work with you to create a brighter future for Illinois children.

Along those lines, we urge you to take action to reduce a needless cause of neurological damage that puts Illinois children at a disadvantage from the start: mercury pollution from coal plants. As Governor, you can protect Illinois children from the threats of mercury by initiating state action to:

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

In utero exposure to mercury, usually via contaminated fish eaten by the expectant mother, can impair thinking, memory, attention, language, and fine motor and visual spatial skills. Similarly, children who eat mercury-contaminated fish are at risk for decreased brain function. Several recent preliminary studies also have linked mercury air pollution to autism. Research suggests that these terrible results are permanent, impacting the child's ability to perform in school and requiring additional educational resources to address his or her special needs.

Neurological damage in children also taxes our economy by reducing children's future job prospects and earning capacity. Along with the education system, our already-strapped health care system bears a heavy cost from the inadequate protection from mercury pollution. Preventing these costs by eliminating mercury pollution at its source will save Illinois families, educators, and service providers considerable heartache, stress, time and money.

Implementing stronger mercury pollution standards will make a real difference for Illinois children. A recent study by the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis calculated that with stronger mercury pollution controls, society could avoid \$44 million to \$66.5 million in costs related to IQ losses. While the Harvard risk numbers assume national adoption of a higher standard, state-based controls likely would bring significant benefits because much of mercury pollution falls locally.

The Bush administration's new "Clean Air Mercury Rule" fails to protect children from the immediate and long-term developmental effects of mercury. With your leadership, Illinois can correct this federal shortcoming by enacting stricter mercury pollution standards at the state level that ensure a brighter, healthier future for all our children.

Sincerely,

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