

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Wednesday, January 11, 2006**

**CONTACT: Jill Geiger, ELPC**  
**312-795-3703**

**Doctors, Children's Advocates, Public Health Organizations and Hospitals  
Announce Support for Governor's Mercury Pollution Reduction Plan**

*Major Coalition Calls on Coal Plant Owners to "Do the Right Thing" by  
Supporting the Governor's Plan to Protect Illinois Children's Health and Environment*

**CHICAGO** – A strong coalition of doctors, children's advocates, public health organizations and hospitals today commended Governor Blagojevich's new mercury pollution reduction plan and announced their support. They then called on the CEOs of companies owning Illinois coal plants to reduce the mercury pollution from their coal plants by 90 percent by June 30, 2009 as provided in the Governor's plan.

"Mercury pollution poisons children and robs them of their full potential in life," said Dr. Helen Binns, director of Children's Memorial Hospital's Pediatric Practice Research Group. "It's time for the owners of coal plants to step up and implement currently available technology to reduce their mercury pollution by 90 percent. As they promote the use of coal in Illinois, we urge them to reduce the negative effect of mercury pollution on our children."

At a news conference held at the Environmental Law & Policy Center's office, the public health coalition released letters to the CEOs of the energy companies that own the Illinois coal plants, urging them to support the Governor's recently announced mercury pollution reduction plan.

The letters were signed by representatives of a wide range of major organizations and institutions, including: African American Center for Health; Alexian Pediatric Center of Excellence; American Academy of Pediatrics, Illinois Chapter; Asian Health Coalition of Illinois; Citizen Action Illinois; Center for African American Health; Health and Medicine Policy Research Group; Illinois Academy of Family Physicians; Gilead Outreach and Referral Center; Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition; Illinois Public Health Association; March of Dimes Illinois Chapter; Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council (representing hospitals in the eight-country metro area); Ounce of Prevention Fund; Physicians for Social Responsibility, Chicago Chapter; Sinai Children's Hospital; Voices For Illinois Children; and YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

-more-

“Governor Blagojevich’s plan increases the protection of women of childbearing age and children from the effects of methylmercury and provides them some of the highest level of safety from mercury pollution in the country,” said Cathy Gray of the March of Dimes’ Illinois Chapter and a perinatal network administrator at the University of Chicago Hospitals.

“Methylmercury is a potent developmental toxin. Chronic exposure to it before birth is associated with developmental delays that affect attention, memory, intelligence, language ability and motor skills.”

Added Voices for Illinois Children President Jerry Stermer: “All children have a right to begin their lives healthy, safe and ready to learn. By reducing mercury pollution from coal plants by 90 percent by June 2009, we will take a huge step towards creating a better future for Illinois children and families.”

Illinois ranks among the top five states nationally for the highest number of severe mercury pollution hot spots. In announcing his plan last week, Governor Blagojevich directed the Illinois EPA to draft new environmental standards to:

- Require Illinois’ coal plants to install modern pollution control technology to reduce mercury pollution by 90 percent or more by June 30, 2009; and
- Prohibit the coal plants from engaging in trading of mercury credits, which would perpetuate mercury pollution hot spots in Illinois.

“The governor’s plan is among the strongest mercury pollution reduction efforts in the nation and will make Illinois a national leader in protecting children’s health,” said Dr. Eric E. Whitaker, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health. “As the governor has outlined, we must reduce mercury pollution by 90 percent by June 30, 2009.”

“The Governor’s Plan will protect our children’s health and the environment by reducing mercury pollution of the Great Lakes and our rivers,” said Howard A. Learner, Executive Director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center. “We urge the CEOs of the out-of-state companies which own the Illinois coal plants to be socially responsible corporate citizens and clean up their plants by 2009 in order to protect our children’s health. Governor Blagojevich’s mercury standards for coal plants will lower the exposure of more than 100,000 women of childbearing age in Illinois whose blood mercury levels may already be dangerously high.”

Coal plants produce close to 60 percent of the mercury pollution in the Great Lakes states. The mercury makes its way into our lakes and rivers, goes up the food chain through fish and then harms people who eat the fish.

The Illinois Department of Public Health has issued “fish advisories” warning everyone – particularly pregnant women, women of childbearing age and children -- to limit their consumption of fish from all Illinois lakes, rivers and streams.

Nationally, six to ten percent of women of childbearing age are estimated to have mercury levels high enough to put their developing children at increased risk for developmental problems. That translates to 230,000 to 410,000 babies born at-risk annually.

###