

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE FAITH COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT DEP'S RULE TO REDUCE MERCURY BY 90 PERCENT

May 1, 2006

Dear Member of the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

We are writing as executives, leaders, and individuals within the faith community in Pennsylvania to ask that you **OPPOSE** House Bill 2610 and Senate Bill 1201, both named the “Clean Air Mercury Compliance Act,” and instead support the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection’s proposed mercury rule.

The bills would prevent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania from enacting a mercury rule that is more stringent than a federal rule (the Clean Air Mercury Rule) that 14 states (including Pennsylvania), many public interest groups, and four Native American tribes have found to be inadequate to protect the health and safety of hundreds of thousands of Americans.

Pennsylvania is home to many aging coal-fired power plants that generate high levels of mercury pollution, creating “hot spots” of mercury contamination at and around these facilities. We understand that Pennsylvania's power plants released more mercury into the air in 2004 than all but one other state (Texas), and that they are responsible for 83 percent of the state’s mercury emissions. The trading system proposed in the federal rule means that the situation in Pennsylvania could remain unchanged—Pennsylvania facilities could continue to pollute at their current high levels by purchasing credits from facilities elsewhere that have surpassed the federal mercury standard. Also of concern is that the federal rule would delay significant action for two decades¹, a delay that is unconscionable in light of what we know about the harmful effects of mercury.

It has long been known that mercury contamination threatens the health of all citizens, but we understand that the risk is greatest for some of our most vulnerable citizens, particularly expecting mothers and children. The impacts on babies and young children are especially profound. Child welfare colleagues have said that exposure to even small amounts of mercury can affect the way children learn, think, memorize and behave, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the mercury level in one of every six women of child-bearing age is unsafe for a developing child. We cannot afford to risk the health of our mothers and children.

Mercury pollution also affects our recreational and fishing industries. Mercury levels are so high that the state has issued warnings concerning consumption of fish from Pennsylvania’s rivers and streams, urging people—particularly women and children—to avoid or dramatically limit their consumption.

Psalm 24 says: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it...” These words are a reminder and a call to all who believe that the earth—this magnificent creation—does not belong to us, but to God. As humans, created in God’s image and who share this fragile planet with all of God’s creation, we bear responsibility for its stewardship. The earth is not ours—we are merely caretakers, charged by God to preserve its beauty and ensure its sustainability.

¹ A review of the rule by the Congressional Research Service finds that though 70% reduction is required by 2018, it won’t take effect until 2030—and then only 70% overall.

We believe that in a healthy society, the well being of **all** is a priority. We believe that we are to love God and to love our neighbors. Healthy persons and communities grow and flourish when society creates a safe environment that does not pose risks for any of its members.

Pennsylvania needs a state-specific mercury rule, and we need it now. The “Clean Air Mercury Compliance Act” is harmful legislation that will put more Pennsylvania infants at risk of brain damage. We urge you to **OPPOSE** H.B. 2610 and S.B. 1201 and to **support** DEP’s proposed mercury rule—a rule that would have a real impact on mercury levels in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

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