

Talking Points for July 2006 Public Hearings on Pennsylvania Mercury Pollution Reduction Rule

The Environmental Quality Board has scheduled three public hearings to collect testimony regarding the Pennsylvania Mercury Rule. To view the rule itself, click [here](#).

Hearing Locations & Times:

- 1 p.m., July 25, in Conference Rooms A & B at DEP's Southwest Regional Office at 500 Waterfront Dr. in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County.
- 1 p.m., July 26, in Room 105 at DEP's headquarters in the Rachel Carson State Office Building at 400 Market St. in Harrisburg, Dauphin County.
- 1 p.m., July 27, in the Delaware Room at DEP's Southeast Regional Office at 2 E. Main St. in Norristown, Montgomery County.

Registration

Individuals who want to present testimony at a hearing should contact the EQB by calling 717-787-4526 in advance of the hearing to reserve a time. IF space and time allow, anyone not registered in advance may be given an opportunity to sign in and testify at the end of the hearing. Oral testimony is limited to 10 minutes per witness. Witnesses should submit three written copies of their testimony to the chairman at the hearing. Organizations are limited to designating one witness to present testimony on their behalf at each hearing.

Talking Points

- **I strongly support the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's proposed rulemaking "Standards for Contaminants: Mercury"** which would amend Chapter 123 of the Pennsylvania Code. (Note: it is important to state explicitly that you support the proposed rulemaking for mercury).
- **Mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants affects health.** Mercury pollution from power plants forms methylmercury, which poses a major health threat to humans and wildlife, primarily from eating fish. Mercury causes serious neurological problems in developing fetuses and babies. Very small amounts of mercury, passed to the child through the mother's blood or milk, can cause health effects. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control verify that over 600,000 women of childbearing age in the U.S. have levels of mercury in their blood higher than that considered safe for their developing babies. Mercury pollution is also causing developmental problems for a wide variety of wildlife, including song birds, mammals, and amphibians.
- **Pennsylvania lakes, rivers, and streams are contaminated with mercury pollution.** Every water in the Commonwealth has advisories on fish consumption due to high levels of mercury and other types of pollution. In over 200 sampling locations in the state, fish have such high amounts of mercury that people are advised to eat no more than two meals of those fish per month.

- **Mercury pollution builds up in areas close to the source, creating dangerous “hot spots” of high mercury concentrations.** Fish in Pennsylvania are highly contaminated with mercury in some areas, not as much in other areas. The areas with the highest concentrations correspond to those places downwind of mercury-spewing coal-fired power plants. Recent DEP data showed that over eight years, mercury levels at a sampling station located in Cambria County near power plants were 47 percent greater than mercury levels recorded at a sampling station located in Tioga County, which is not close to mercury sources. Recent EPA-funded studies show that up to 70 percent of mercury contamination comes from local and regional sources. The studies also show that cleaning up mercury pollution at nearby sources results in significant drops in mercury contamination in nearby fish.
- **Pennsylvania is number two in the nation for mercury pollution to air from coal-fired power plants.** The most recent Toxic Release Inventory from the Environmental Protection Agency ranks Pennsylvania as second worst in the nation for mercury pollution to the air, behind only Texas. This is up from third in 2004.
- **The federal Clean Air Mercury Rule (CAMR) does too little too late.** CAMR proponents claim that Pennsylvania will see an 86 percent drop in mercury pollution as a result of the federal rule. But the Congressional Research Service has detailed that CAMR won't deliver the reductions it promises, due to mercury pollution trading, where dirty plants are allowed to buy credits from cleaner, more modern ones. Pennsylvania plants are traditionally the number one purchasers of pollution credits. Overall, the Congressional Research Service concluded that CAMR would result in *at best* a 70 percent reduction in mercury emissions, but not until 2030 or later. The Pennsylvania rule as proposed requires that plants in the state must reduce their mercury emission levels by 90 percent by 2015, and does not allow mercury trading. Further, Pennsylvania and 15 other states, are challenging CAMR as illegal under the Clean Air Act, because it fails to treat mercury as the hazardous pollutant that it is. Should the legal action prevail, CAMR will be struck down, and we will be left with no protections from mercury pollution. A number of other states have already passed their own, more protective mercury reduction rules, and many others are in the process of doing so.
- **Mercury pollution controls are available and affordable, and Pennsylvania coal-fired power plants are very profitable.** Like a fully paid home mortgage, capital costs at coal-fired plants in Pennsylvania have been paid off. They are baseload plants that run all of the time, making electricity at costs far below wholesale prices, which more and more frequently is set by the cost of electricity produced by *gas-fired* plants. Wholesale electricity prices range between six and seven cents per kilowatt hour (kWh); coal-fired power plants produce electricity at a cost of between three and four cents per kWh. A recent National Wildlife Federation report estimated that the average customer would see an increase of **\$1.08 on monthly electric bills if all the cost were passed through to consumers.** In Pennsylvania's competitive retail electricity market, electricity suppliers cannot just routinely pass on their costs. They can choose to pass on none, some or all of their costs, or they can decide to reduce profits.
- **An overwhelming majority of Pennsylvanians support the state mercury rule, even if it means paying more on electricity bills.** A recent opinion poll conducted by Terry

Madonna Research Opinion found that 4 out of 5 Pennsylvanians support a mercury rule that is stronger and implemented faster than the federal rule. Eighty percent of the respondents would be willing to pay up to \$1.08 more on the electricity in support of the Pennsylvania rule. More than 60 health-affected, health, women's, children's, sporting, faith-based, environmental and conservation organizations around the state support the Pennsylvania rule. Over 100 hunting and angling clubs around the state support the rule. Over 100 medical experts and faith leaders around the state have co-signed letters in support of the state-specific rule.

- **The federal mercury rule is bad for Pennsylvania's economy.** Mercury contamination is threatening the Commonwealth's sporting, angling, and recreation industry, a significant source of revenue and jobs throughout the state. Because of the trading system set up in CAMR, Pennsylvania plants are more likely to pay for pollution credits than to clean up and modernize old plants. As a result, jobs are exported to other states, in the form of skilled labor required for the technological upgrades. As the electricity market becomes more integrated, cleaner plants (in other states) will out-compete their dirty counterparts (in Pennsylvania), forcing plants to close and more jobs to be lost. Pennsylvania's rule encourages use of bituminous coal (mined in Pennsylvania and in nearby states). The federal rule makes it more attractive for plants to switch to coal mined from Western states. Most importantly, there are significant costs associated with the devastating health impacts; rates of learning disabilities and associated health effects of mercury in children are increasing.
- **Personalize your testimony.** Be sure to state things in your own words, and to share your own personal reasons for supporting the Pennsylvania rule.

Written Comments

The Environmental Quality Board is accepting comments via e-mail or mail (not via fax) until August 26, 2006. Click here to use PennFuture's [Action Center](#) to send your comments electronically, or to customize your comments and print to mail them to the EQB.

If you would like to volunteer to get post cards signed in support of the Pennsylvania Mercury Rule, please e-mail Heather Sage at sageATpennfuture.org to request cards, or call at 412-258-6681. We also have stickers and posters available.

