

RECEIVED

July 25, 2006

2006 AUG -2 PM 3:01

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Environmental Quality Board
Department of Environmental Protection
Rachel Carson State Office Building
400 Market St.
Harrisburg, PA

RE: Statement for Testimony at the Harrisburg Public Hearing on Pennsylvania's State-Specific Mercury Reduction Rule

Dear Environmental Quality Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the proposed state-specific mercury reduction rule. I am testifying in favor of this rule.

Mercury levels have been a concern of mine since I was first warned about them 13 years ago. At that time, I was pregnant with my first child. I was a healthy individual who attempted to eat a good diet – a diet that included quite a bit of fish, since that was lauded by expert after expert as being one of the best foods to eat. Unfortunately, even then, this normally healthy food had become dangerous. The mercury levels were too high, and I was advised to severely limit my intake.

Through two pregnancies and two stretches of time spent nursing, I largely stopped eating fish. Now, I have lost the habit of eating it. Worse, my children never established that habit at all. It was simply too dangerous to let them eat this food when they were young, and most of our lifelong food tastes are established during those early years. So, we are now a family that does not eat what should be a healthy food.

This may seem like a minor effect, but my story is mirrored over and over throughout Pennsylvania and across the nation. We are becoming a county that does not eat fish. This affects the fishing industry; it affects the sport of fishing; and in the long run, it affects our health. This, by itself, is a high price to pay for continuing to pollute our waters. However, it's far from being the only price we pay.

Mercury is in our rainwater, streams, rivers, and lakes. We are advised to limit our fish intake from state waters, but little has been studied beyond that. How safe is our "normal" exposure? Does it matter if the individual in question is a baby, or a pregnant woman, or an elderly person with a weak immune system? Last year and this year, we have had major problems with flooding throughout the state. Has anyone examined the after-effects of having mercury-laden water flood your house?

There is too much we don't know, and what we do know is hardly comforting. High mercury levels have been found in songbirds, salamanders, and other wildlife that don't live in the water and don't eat fish. These are the "canaries in the mine" showing us what environmental contamination can cause. We shouldn't ignore that warning.

Turning to people, the Environmental Protection Agency now estimates that one in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her body to put a developing baby at risk – risks that include birth defects as well as myriad other health problems. That's *one* in *six*, not exactly a minor risk. We implemented seat belt laws and child car seat regulations for far lower risks than that.

Mercury is an extremely toxic substance, in the same league as plutonium. Stop for a moment and think how we'd react if plutonium were in our rainwater, streams, rivers, and lakes at dangerous levels. Would we hesitate to implement strong reduction methods? Would we give power plants 25 years to make a dent in the problem? Of course not. We never would have let the situation get this far, yet we have ignored these dangers with mercury. Why?

Mercury has been linked to ADHD, autism, cerebral palsy, developmental delays, vision problems, and learning disorders in children. It has also been shown to damage the brain, spinal cord, nervous system, kidneys, liver, cardiovascular system, immune system, and heart. The list goes on and on. The DEP's own estimates state that approximately 480,000 children born in the U.S. have neurological problems because of prenatal exposure to mercury. In adults, there is evidence that mercury contributes to Multiple Sclerosis, infertility, breast cancer, and Fibromyalgia. At all ages, this neurotoxin adds stress to the body, making the effects of other illnesses worse. We'll never know how many cases of cancer or other disease have been made worse by exposure to mercury. We'll never know how many deaths this substance has caused and will continue to cause through the years.

Despite all the dangers of mercury, a few people argue against the proposed rules because they might increase our monthly power rates slightly. This argument does not take into consideration the current and future costs of mercury. We pay for this contamination through our health and our wallets. We pay for special education costs for those children whose brains are damaged by this toxin. We pay for health care costs for mercury-harmed individuals on state support. We pay for the many health effects of this toxin through increased health insurance premiums. We pay in our own increased medical costs. Compared with all these costs, a \$1-\$2 per month increase in our power rates is the bargain of the century! Even at ten times this cost, the proposed rules would pay for themselves easily, and in a manner that is far easier on all of us than the status quo.

It's time to face the reality that mercury affects us all deeply. We need a reduction approach that will cut mercury levels quickly and effectively. The federal guidelines are simply not enough. Please, for the sake of every man, woman, and child in this state, implement the stronger proposal you're considering. It's long overdue.

Sincerely,



Roberta Jarnagin-Blaylock
6509 Blue Ridge Ave.
Harrisburg, PA 17112
(717) 657-8016
RobertaBlaylock@verizon.net

References:

On Earth Day Women Battle Rising Mercury Hazards, by Molly M. Ginty, published 04/22/05 by Women's eNews

Store-Bought Fish in 22 States Tested for Mercury, Mercury Policy Project, 09/15/05

2005 Mercury In Rain Report, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

Proposed Rulemaking: Mercury Emission Reduction Requirements for Electric Generating Units, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection