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DEP Testimony Forest Coalition

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
COMMISSION
4:00 minutes

July 26, 2006

Good afternoon. My name is Richard Martin and I represent the Pennsylvania Forest Coalition.

A] How many of you present have heard of Minamata, Japan ?

I believe that is the most severe case of Mercury poisoning to date.

Go to your computer and Google "Minamata Disease".

You're in for an education.

This was documented by photojournalist W. Eugene Smith* around 1970-1971. I read about it 30 years ago and the stark black & white photographs have been burned in my mind ever since.

Our legislators, who seem bent on destroying DEP's mission of protecting public health, should all read Smith's book. It's not a scientific treatise - it's a stark record of the effects of fetal mercury poisoning.

B] While I tell people "I ain't half as dumb as I look", our legislators seem bent on proving something else.

Many legislators are ignoring the medical facts; they pretend to view this as an economic issue. This is clearly a health issue and DEP has the expertise to handle it. Our legislators are unqualified to override DEP in matters of public health. The Federal standards are ineffectual.

A recent statewide poll * by PennFuture reported that 80 percent of Pennsylvanians support the state's plan to reduce mercury. It was also significant that only 13 percent of those surveyed believe that power plants and industry would cut their pollution voluntarily.

Since our legislators are supposed to represent us, **I challenge every one of them to survey his or her constituents, asking the identical questions regarding regulation of mercury.**

Any legislators who fail to conduct a survey are demonstrating that they don't want to know the wishes of their constituents.

Since Section 27 *** of our Pennsylvania Constitution states that "The people have a right to clean air and pure water", my wish is to be able to fish in Pennsylvania waters without having to contend with warnings of fish contaminated by high levels of mercury.

C] Pennsylvania power plants are polluting to the tune of about 8,000 pounds of mercury a year; that's more than 49 other states (we're the pentultimate in pollution – beat out only by Texas).

Commenting on the situation, a **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette** editorial stated that "It takes a special sort of irresponsibility to slight these risks to ordinary Pennsylvanians by insisting on weaker standards, but sadly the Senate was up to the task."

That vote was 40 to 10 for passage of SB 1201. I thank my Senator Pat Vance and 9 others for voting against that harmful bill.

D] They say "there ain't no upper limit to ignorance". Some of our legislators seem to be on their way to proving that. Perhaps the most ignorant part is that their legislation would allow electric companies to buy "credits" from electric generators in other states that already meet mercury standards without having to do anything about emissions in Pennsylvania.

I fully support DEP in their efforts to protect public health in Pennsylvania by implementing mercury regulations and reducing mercury emissions at the state's 36 coal-fired power plants. That's only proper, because they account for 83 % of the mercury which is poisoning Pennsylvania.

Thank you for your time.

Richard A. Martin
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Footnotes

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<http://72.14.209.104/search?q=cache:OY1GC1Fo59EJ:www.geocities.com/minoltaphotographyw/willameugenesmith.html+minamata+w+eugene+smith&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=3&ie=UTF-8>

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< <http://www.pennfuture.org/docs/poll06-05-06.pdf> >

for details on the poll.

Section 27. Natural Resources and the Public Estate

"The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people."