

My name is Ryan Karins of Lower Paxton Township, and I support the Department of Environmental Protection's state-specific mercury reduction rule, which would cut mercury pollution from Pennsylvania's coal-fired power plants 90% by the year 2015.

Mercury is a neurotoxin that poses significant health hazards even in miniscule quantities. Exposure to mercury can lead to developmental problems in babies and children, affecting how they learn, think, memorize, and behave. In fact, the EPA has estimated that one in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her body to put her child at risk, should she become pregnant. I do not think I am alone when I state that every baby should have the right to develop to his or her full potential.

The most common way that people are exposed to mercury is by eating contaminated fish, and as an angler, I am aware of the statewide freshwater fish consumption advisory, warning people to limit their consumption of fish from the waterways of Pennsylvania. I do not think I am alone when I believe that I should be able to consume the fish that I catch without worrying about their mercury content.

Most of the mercury pollution in our commonwealth comes from our coal-fired power plants, which are the largest unregulated source of mercury pollution. In fact, Pennsylvania's mercury emissions from our coal-fired power plants rank second in the entire nation. Since mercury is a heavy metal, most mercury from these plants falls locally. Critics of this rule claim that the science is not there to prove that coal-fired power plants are the main culprit, but a recent EPA study found that 67% of the mercury in rain collected at a monitoring site in Steubenville, Ohio originated from coal-burning plants within 400 miles of the site.

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Proponents of the federal rule claim that it will reduce mercury pollution by 86%, but the Congressional Research Service has concluded that the rule's 70% mercury pollution reduction target might not be met until 2030 or even later. Also the federal rule allows power plants to avoid significant mercury reductions by instead purchasing mercury pollution 'credits' from other power plants in other parts of the country. Considering the scientific fact that most mercury emissions fall locally, this trading program creates mercury "hot-spots" around coal plants that would rather buy their way out of compliance, rather than commit to reducing their emissions of such a powerful neurotoxin.

This state-specific rule is not new. In fact, ten other states have passed similar rules and their reductions have yielded amazing results. A Florida Everglades study has shown a 60-70% decline in the mercury content of fish and wading birds due to local mercury emission reduction efforts. A similar state-specific plan in Massachusetts has yielded a 32% drop in mercury pollution in the state's northeastern lakes in only 7-years since its passing.

I know that I am not alone today when I state that similar successes, scientific facts, and simple human morality are all reasons why Pennsylvanians deserve a rule that polices our biggest mercury polluters instead of one which allows the polluters to police themselves. That is why it is imperative that Pennsylvania moves forward in implementing the DEP's state-specific mercury reduction plan. The health of our born and unborn children is at stake.