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2006 AUG -2 AM 10:05

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY

Environmental Quality Board Public Hearing
Thursday, July 27th, 2006
PA Mercury Regulations
Testimony of Frances Ann Leary

Thank you to Representative Adolph and members of the Environmental Quality Board for hearing my testimony this afternoon. My name is Annie Leary, and I live in South Philadelphia. I'm here today to testify in favor of the proposed Pennsylvania specific mercury regulations.

Over the past year, I've heard both sides of the argument for and against adopting state mercury regulations. Both sides were argued with impressive facts and figures presented by experts on both sides countering the other. In my mind and amongst most parents across the state, what this really comes down to is simple; Taking a precautionary and proactive approach to keeping children safe and healthy, acting responsibility for the benefit of our youngest citizens, and moving forward with smarter energy solutions that will benefit everyone long term.

Just a few years ago, Pennsylvania was listed by the Environmental Protection Agency as the third worst polluter of mercury in the United States. Today, we are ranked second to Texas, a state that is 5 times the size of Pennsylvania! Clearly we have not been moving in the right direction and the federal rule will not fix this problem.

Mercury is a known neurotoxin, this is a fact confirmed by the Environmental Protection Agency, so why would we do anything other than work to reduce mercury pollution? We take a million other precautions to ensure that women give birth to healthy children, like regular check ups, eating a well balanced diet, taking vitamins, many women spend thousands of dollars in medical expenses to ensure they are doing everything right to give birth to healthy babies, so why not take a precaution like this one. More and more these days, despite the individual precautions we take during pregnancy, babies are born with neurological disorders, learning disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, and other unexplained diseases. This is unacceptable.

Many doctors will tell you that although it is recommended to avoid some fish during pregnancy, it is actually healthier to eat fish during pregnancy because of the benefits of omega 3 fatty acids than to avoid fish because of the risks of mercury. Imagine you're a woman being told two very different things and trying to make a decision that may affect your child for the rest of his or her life. Pregnant women should NOT have to make this decision. The state of Pennsylvania should NOT take a risk with women and children's health by adopting the weak federal mercury rule.

There may be varying data on how far mercury travels through the air, where it lands, or how often babies are affected, but even one child born with the damaging effects of mercury pollution is too many. Regardless of whether we can trace the mercury laden fish directly back to one of our power plants, adopting a strong regulation for our state will help set a precedent for other states, in fact it already has! Almost half of the United

States are developing stronger mercury standards than the Federal Government's Rule. Unless we are willing to tell even one mother that her child's health was not worth the cost of installing technology on our power plants, we must implement state wide regulations that take the strongest steps possible to reduce the mercury we contribute to the atmosphere. We cannot allow our society to get to a point where we are avoiding food and water because it is unsafe or contaminated, we must address the cause of these problems. Luckily, the problem of mercury pollution has an affordable solution.

We banned lead paint in the late 70's because it could cause neurological damage in children. It is a neurotoxin. Children may have to eat a significant amount of lead paint chips or be exposed to large quantities of lead paint dust to be negatively affected, but to reduce the risk, we took precautions. The same thing needs to happen with mercury pollution.

It is time to take responsibility for the mercury pollution we contribute to waterways both statewide and beyond from our 36 coal-fired power plants. It is critical that we adopt the PA specific state mercury reduction rule that calls for a two phase reduction of mercury pollution (80% by 2010 and 90% by 2015) prohibits the trading of mercury pollution credits. For our families and our future. Thank you.

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