

July 27 2006

To the Members of the Environmental Quality Board:

I thank you for this opportunity to testify; unfortunately, I am unable to testify today in person.

I am a Roman Catholic nun who is extremely concerned about the deleterious effects on human beings and God's earth from the dangerous toxin mercury. I urge our state to do the morally responsible thing and vote to implement the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's plan to rid our fish and waterways of mercury.

This is more than an environmental issue, a political issue, or a fiscal issue. It is a moral issue that involves protecting people, especially young children, from a toxic substance ~~and~~ that causes significant developmental disabilities. Public health and safety are at stake here.

The Catholic Church has a clear and consistent environmental ethic. The late Pope John Paul II's extensive environmental writings make clear that the Church views protecting the environment as a moral imperative.

One has to look no further than the writings of the late John Paul II. Stating in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*: "The 'dominion' granted by the Creator is not an absolute power." The Pope debunks the notion that God's creation can be freely exploited and wasted by humans at will. He makes clear that the "dominion" of the Book of Genesis means that all people are to be stewards of life-sustaining resources. Clearly, mercury is a detriment to human life.

It saddens me that our wonderful state of Pennsylvania has the unhappy distinction of ranking second in the country in mercury emissions. The state Department of Environmental Protection has advised pregnant women to severely limit their intake of fish due to its high mercury content; Consumer Reports magazine has recently issued the same warning.

I pray that the sensible plan proposed by the Department of Environmental Protection to reduce mercury emissions from power plants by 90% by 2015 will be implemented. And we must now ~~not~~ allow the trading of mercury emissions, which would allow particularly dirty power plants to continue the unabated spewing of mercury. Opponents of the state plan support the much weaker federal standard, which would not become effective until 2018. As a young mother pointed out

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recently, another entire generation of children will have been exposed to mercury by that time if we don't act in Pennsylvania.

A recent poll shows that Pennsylvanians want mercury out of their food, water and air, and they appear willing to pay for it. Four out of five Pennsylvanians say they would pay the estimated one-dollar monthly increase on their electric bill to make their children safer. Certainly, we must rely on coal for our energy needs, but we also must implement the available technology to remove the mercury from Pennsylvania's smoke stacks and make that energy safe.

Lifting the lens of faith to our present environmental crisis invites every person who benefits from the abundance of God's creation to also share in the responsibility to be stewards of God's creation. Not only because "God made the earth, and saw that it was good," as the Book of Genesis tells us, but because our very existence depends on our protecting our planet. Sensible regulation of mercury is a big step in the right direction.

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