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Mercury Pollution in Pennsylvania: Why we need a state mercury reduction regulation

DEP's proposal to reduce power plant mercury emissions 90% by 2015 should be supported by the EQB. This proposal is a balanced approach that will protect our health, while affording considerable flexibility to industry regarding compliance. **Pennsylvania power plants are the second largest source of mercury emissions in the U.S.** It is critical that PA takes strong action to reduce mercury emissions from all state power plants.

Health impacts:

- The mainstream medical consensus is that mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that harms the developing brains of babies. Developmental delays, lowered IQ, and learning disabilities are known to be caused by even low level mercury exposure.
- Leading medical, public health, and nursing experts in Pennsylvania have supported strong across the board action by Pennsylvania to immediately reduce mercury emissions from power plants, rather than wait for the slower, weaker federal regulations to take effect. Signers of this letter included: Dr. Robert Cicco, President, PA Academy of Pediatrics, Michele Campbell, MSN, RN, Executive Administrator, PA State Nurses Assoc., Dr. Fred Harchelroad, Director, Medical Toxicology Treatment Center, Allegheny General Hospital, and Dr. James Roberts, Director of Research, Magee-Womens Hospital.
- The correct public health approach is not to warn people against eating fish due to mercury contamination, but to get the mercury out of fish.

Why we need a state rule:

- **The federal rule does not mandate that Pennsylvania power plants make emission reductions.** Because of the emission trading provisions, PA plants may instead buy emission credits from plants in other states. Mercury emissions in Pennsylvania could remain at dangerous levels under the federal trading program. In essence, when companies buy credits, PA electric customers are subsidizing pollution control in other states.
- Trading of emission credits will also allow for mercury "hotspots" to exist in Pennsylvania. Companies that buy emission credits, rather than reduce emissions, can expose nearby residents to high levels of mercury contamination. **Requiring all PA power plants to make significant mercury emission reductions is critical** to ensuring that no mercury hotspots remain in the state.
- The federal rule acts over a very long time frame, in part because the use of trading eliminates exact deadlines for action. The non-partisan Congressional Research Service conducted an analysis of the federal rule using EPA's own data. CRS found that the purported **70% national reduction under the federal rule would not be reached until 2025 to 2030.** This would allow another full generation of children to be put at risk.