



Mercury Free Wisconsin

Environmental Groups Weigh In on Proposed Changes to Mercury Regulation, Call for Stronger Rule to Protect Lakes and Public Health

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Madison, WI – Today, several environmental groups from across Wisconsin submitted comments on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' proposed changes to Chapter NR 446 of the Wisconsin Administration Code, which regulates mercury emissions from power plants. While the proposed changes are an improvement over current regulation, these environmental groups believe they fall short of what is necessary to protect public health and welfare.

The groups challenge Wisconsin's lawmakers to be leaders in reducing mercury emissions by requiring higher reductions on a quicker timetable. The DNR's proposed changes require large coal-fired plants to achieve a 90% mercury reduction by January 1, 2015, with other allowances that provide for a multi-pollution approach that would not require 90% reduction until 2021. This is more time than coal-fired plants need, as evidenced by regulations passed by Wisconsin's neighboring states, Illinois and Minnesota.

"The schedule set forth in this rule is insufficient to protect public health and the environment," stated Karen Schapiro, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates. "Four years is ample time for coal power plants to implement suitable emission controls. Seven years? Thirteen years? That's far too long to wait when our neighbors are reducing their emissions on a much quicker timeline."

Jennifer Feyerherm, Associate Representative in Sierra Club's Midwest office, agreed. "If Illinois and Minnesota are stepping forward and setting goals to reduce mercury emissions as soon as 2012, Wisconsin needs to take responsibility and pursue equally effective and thorough regulations."

"Mercury pollution is endangering public health and ruining our ability to enjoy our lakes," said Dan Kohler, Wisconsin Environment Director. "It's time to join other states using available technology to clean up coal-fired power plants."

Over 2,000 citizens and members of the involved organizations have expressed their support of a 90% reduction by 2012. Organizations signing on to the letter include Midwest Environmental Advocates, Wisconsin Environment, Sierra Club, Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers, Mercury Free Wisconsin and Clean Wisconsin. The DNR is accepting comments on the proposed rule changes through today.

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Fast Facts

- Mercury is a naturally occurring trace element found in the environment. It is also a pollutant released into the environment by human activities, particularly coal-fired power plants.¹ It is estimated that coal-fired power plants will account for 86 percent of total mercury emissions in Wisconsin by 2010.²
- The most common method of exposure to mercury for humans is through consumption of mercury contained in their food supply.³ Ingested mercury can cause serious health problems, including loss of coordination and affected vision, hearing and speech in adults, as well as cardiovascular disease and increased rates of heart attacks in older adults.⁴ In pregnant women, mercury can be passed on to the developing fetus, and at sufficient exposure may lead to a number of neurological effects.⁵
- Due to excessive mercury contamination of surface waters, DNR has issued fish consumption advisories for almost all of the waterbodies in the State.
- Midwest Environmental Advocates is the first and only non-profit environmental law center in Wisconsin. MEA's mission is to provide legal and technical support to grassroots groups seeking to establish environmental justice. More information is available at www.midwestadvocates.org.
- Sierra Club is the oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization, with over 1.3 million supporters worldwide, including more than 15,000 in Wisconsin. More information is available at www.wisconsin.sierraclub.org.
- Wisconsin Environment is a statewide citizen-based environmental advocacy organization. More information is available at www.wisconsinenvironment.org.
- Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers is the licensed Milwaukee Riverkeeper®, and is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting water quality and wildlife habitat in the river corridors and to advocate for sound land use in the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic River Watersheds. More information is available at www.mkeriverkeeper.org.
- Mercury Free Wisconsin is a coalition of almost 50 health, sporting and environmental groups working in concert to end the threat of mercury pollution to the health and welfare of residents in Wisconsin.
- Clean Wisconsin protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and polluters accountable. More information is available at www.cleanwisconsin.org.

¹ WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MERCURY IN FISH, <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/consumption/questions.html> (last visited Mar. 28, 2008).

² WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, FACTSHEET ON MERCURY PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE FINDING 1 (Mar. 2008), available at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/air/pdf/PublAM3912008.pdf>.

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Mercury Health Effects, <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/effects.htm> (last visited Mar. 28, 2008).

⁴ WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, CHOOSE WISELY: A HEALTH GUIDE FOR EATING FISH IN WISCONSIN 7 (2007) (*hereinafter* HEALTH GUIDE FOR EATING FISH IN WISCONSIN).

⁵ 70 Fed. Reg. at 28641.