

# **Power Plants' Mercury Pollution: Jeopardizing the Health and Future of our Children and Ecosystems**

## **MERCURY IMPAIRS CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO WALK, TALK AND LEARN.**

Mercury, a highly toxic heavy metal, affects the central nervous system a lot like lead does. Even low levels of mercury exposure *in utero* or during early childhood can cause poor attention span and language development, impaired memory and vision, difficulty processing information, and/or impaired fine motor coordination.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that every year over 630,000 babies in the United States are born exposed to unsafe levels of mercury. Furthermore, Mount Sinai School of Medicine's Center for Children's Health and the Environment found that mental retardation from mercury poisoning costs our nation billions of dollars each year.

## **MERCURY IS ENDANGERING NEW YORK'S ECOLOGICAL FUTURE.**

New York State is hard hit by mercury pollution. The New York State Department of Health warns women (18-49y.o.) and children against eating most fish caught in the Adirondacks and Catskills. This year, in addition to the general advisory for women and children, the state advises everyone to significantly limit consumption of specific fish populations from 87 water bodies across the state because of mercury contamination. The number of mercury contaminated waters in New York continues to grow. Limiting where New Yorkers and tourists can safely catch and eat fish will also hurt New York's \$1 billion recreational fishing industry.

Wildlife is already showing the detrimental impacts of mercury contamination. A recent study found that Northeastern Loons with high mercury levels have 40 percent fewer young than those with less mercury. Another study found high mercury in small songbirds that do not eat fish, and is currently studying the effects of such high mercury levels.

## **POWER PLANT POLLUTION IS A BIG PROBLEM.**

Power plants are the largest source emitting mercury air pollution. Every year, New York's power plants alone report polluting about 1,000 pounds of this highly toxic metal.

Mercury pollution, largely from power plants, is deposited in bodies of water and converted into another mercury compound, which builds up in larger fish that we eat such as bass, swordfish, perch, tuna, walleye and trout. As little as 0.002 pounds of mercury deposited annually into a 25-acre lake will contaminate fish to a level where they are unsafe to eat.

## **POLLUTION CONTROLS CLEAN UP MERCURY CONTAMINATION.**

The mercury pollution from New York's coal-fired power plants travels 50-500 miles, likely falling into our waters and contaminating fish, but reductions in smokestack emissions lead to clear benefits. This spring Massachusetts released data that showed a 32% reduction of mercury in local fish less than a decade after setting a stringent mercury standard for incinerators. Studies in Wisconsin and Florida have shown similar results.

# NEW YORK STATE PROPOSES A DRAFT MERCURY RULE

On September 6th, the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) finally proposed a draft regulation that would require each power plant to reduce mercury pollution in two phases.

## Phase I

- Time Period: January 1, 2010 - December 31, 2014
- Emissions Limit: 746 pounds of mercury pollution distributed among 13 facilities.
- Analysis:
  - The 746 pounds were derived from what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allotted New York State in its rule: 784 pounds. DEC kept 5% of the allotted pollution in case new facilities are built in New York during this time. It is worth noting that New York State, with many others, is suing the EPA over their rule for being too lenient and not in keeping with the federal Clean Air Act.
  - DEC has estimated the 746 pounds to be a 50% reduction from current pollution levels, but another analysis by environmental groups estimated the reduction to be as low as 27%. This second analysis also shows certain plants, such as AES Somerset and the Lovett facilities actually being able to increase their mercury pollution. (This can be made available upon request.)

## Phase II

- Time Period: January 1, 2015 on
- Emissions Limit: 0.6 pounds mercury per trillion Btu (heat input) at each unit of a coal-fired power plant.
- Analysis: DEC estimates this limit to be a 90% reduction in mercury pollution. The Pataki administration deserves praise for requiring 90% mercury pollution reductions at every power plant unit. That is the right approach, which other states have used. However, these other states are requiring their mercury reductions years sooner

State	Mercury Reduction Plan	Status
New Jersey	95% by 2007 (5 year extension with new pollution controls)	Regulation Finalized in 2004
Connecticut	90% by 2008	Law Enacted in 2002
Massachusetts	80% by 2008 and 90% by 2012	Regulation Finalized in 2004
Pennsylvania	80% by 2010 and 90% by 2015	Regulation Proposed in 2006
Illinois	90% by mid-2009	Regulation Proposed in 2006

**TELL DEC THAT NEW YORKERS NEED DEEPER REDUCTIONS SOONER.**

DEC should change the final regulation to require a 90% mercury pollution reduction at each power plant by 2010. Such a standard is in keeping with what other states are doing, and is feasible and affordable. The difference between DEC's proposal and requiring 90% mercury reductions at each power plant unit in 2010 is almost 3,000 pounds of needless pollution.

It is vital that New Yorkers make their voice heard in the public comment period, which ends October 20th. All written testimony needs to reference "the proposed addition of Part 246 to Title 6 NYCRR."

To learn more about the proposed power plant mercury rule and how to comment go to [www.nypirg.org/energy/mercury.html](http://www.nypirg.org/energy/mercury.html). You can also call DEC (518-402-8403) for the regulations or comment information.