

May 17, 2012

Re: Support EPA Mercury and Air Toxics Standards

Dear Senators:

As communities of faith, we are called to protect the most vulnerable among us and to serve as stewards of God's Creation. In keeping with these teachings, we urge you to oppose any attempt to overturn or delay the Environmental Protection Agency's final Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATs). Such a national standard would reduce harmful exposure to mercury pollution and other air toxics, including arsenic, chromium, nickel, and acid gases, from power plants in the United States. This hazardous air pollution has harmful impacts on the health and welfare of all people, particularly on children, poor and vulnerable communities, and on all Creation.

For more than twenty years, communities of faith around the country have sought stronger standards to reduce harmful air pollution that threatens both the youngest and poorest members of our society. One in six babies born in the U.S. now contains harmful levels of mercury in their blood. These precious children will face potential brain damage, lower intelligence, or other severe neurological disorders.¹ As the National Institutes of Health stated in a recent medical paper:

Mercury is a highly toxic element; there is no known safe level of exposure. Ideally, neither children nor adults should have any mercury in their bodies because it provides no physiological benefit.²

Even slight increases in environmental exposure to mercury may lead to adverse effects on nervous system development.³ In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics stated:

We agree with the strong evidence the EPA provides to support their decision that the proposed rule is both appropriate and necessary to protect public health ...⁴

Coal-fired power plants produce the largest domestic amounts of mercury. Once emitted, mercury falls from the air into our water sources, becomes part of the food chain, and is consumed by pregnant mothers when they eat contaminated fish. The dangers from mercury and heavy metals emissions have long been known, particularly in children before and after birth. Every state has issued fish advisories for pregnant women.

¹ See Kathryn R. Mahaffey et al., "Blood Organic Mercury and Dietary Mercury Intake: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999 and 2000," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 112, #5 (April 2004): <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/members/2003/6587/6587.html>, and Leonardo Trasande, et al., Public Health and Economic Consequences of Methyl Mercury Toxicity to the Developing Brain, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol. 113, No. 5 (May 2005): p. 593; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1257552/pdf/ehp0113-000590.pdf>. <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/forum/2004/presentations/monday/mahaffey.pdf>.

² Stephan Bose-O'Reilly, MD, MPH, Kathleen M. McCarty, ScD, MPH, Nadine Steckling, BSc, and Beate Lettmeier, PhD, "Mercury Exposure and Children's Health", *Curr Probl Pediatr Adolesc Health Care*. 2010 September; 40(8): 186-215. doi:10.1016/j.cppeds.2010.07.002. See also National Academy of Sciences, *Toxicological Effects of Methylmercury* (2000): 13-14.

³ Grandjean, Phillippe, Hiroshi Satoh, Katsuyuki Murata, and Komyo Eto, "Adverse Effects of Methylmercury: Environmental Research Implementations", *Environ Health Perspect* 118:1137-1145.

⁴ <http://www.lungusa.org/get-involved/advocate/advocacy-documents/epa-mercury-other-health.pdf>

The EPA reported that Mercury and Air Toxics Standards will result in significant health co-benefits, including preventing premature deaths, heart attacks, and asthma attacks every year and saving individuals a minimum of \$37 billion each year in health care costs.⁵

President George H.W. Bush signed the 1990 Clean Air Act (CAA) demonstrating that protecting human life from pollution was not a partisan issue. The CAA mandated and empowered the removal of air toxins to protect public health. We have been waiting for over twenty years for necessary standards to reduce hazardous air pollution and protect children's health. We ask the Senate to act in a bipartisan fashion to protect the most vulnerable in our society, and to uphold the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards as finalized by the EPA. Our children and Creation cannot wait any longer.

As one signatory to this letter, Catholic Bishop Stephen Blaire stated, "In the end it just makes good sense to want to have clean air for our children and families to breathe and for future generations."

We urge you to protect America's children and most vulnerable people by supporting the MATS rule and opposing any legislative attempt to weaken this rule.

Sincerely,

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⁵ Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, www.epg.gov/ttn/ecas/regdata/RIAs/matsriafinal.pdf, Accessed May 1, 2012.

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