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Illinois Academy of Family Physicians

the
VISION the
VOICE of Today's Family Physician

September 19, 2006

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Office of the Clerk
 Illinois Pollution Control Board
 100 W. Randolph St.
 Chicago, IL 60601

RECEIVED
 CLERK'S OFFICE
 SEP 20 2006
 STATE OF ILLINOIS
 Pollution Control Board

PC 6314

Re: Proposed New 35 ILL. ADM. CODE 225, Control of Emissions from Large Combustion Sources (Mercury); R06-25

Dear Honorable Members of the Board:

I am writing to express the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians support for the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's proposed rule to reduce mercury pollution, as amended to include the recent agreements with Ameren and Dynegy. This rule is critical to protect the health of all Illinoisans – especially women of childbearing age, children and the unborn – and is technologically feasible and cost effective.

As you know, mercury is a neurotoxin that can pass through the placenta and poison fetal brain development. Every day, thousands of developing fetuses, newborns and young children are exposed to mercury when pregnant and nursing women eat contaminated fish, or children eat fish themselves. Nationally, 6 to 10 percent of women of childbearing age are estimated to have mercury levels high enough to put their developing children at increased risk for developmental problems. Here in Illinois, that translates to more than 100,000 women of childbearing age whose blood mercury levels may exceed the federal recommended limit.

The southern Great Lakes region has among the highest mercury deposition rates in the U.S. In Illinois, mercury pollution has created severe mercury "hot spots," areas where the threat to public health is elevated. In fact, Illinois ranks fourth in the U.S. for most severe mercury pollution hot spots.

What's the result of all this mercury pollution? Fish in Lake Michigan and all Illinois waterways are contaminated with mercury. The problem is so bad that the Illinois Department of Public Health warns everyone – particularly pregnant women, women of childbearing age and children – to limit their consumption of fish from every lake, river and stream in Illinois.

Much of mercury pollution comes from local and regional sources. So by reducing mercury pollution at its largest sources – coal-fired power plants – we can reduce mercury concentrations in fish and lower the harmful effects of mercury exposure

-MORE-

Illinois must take action on mercury pollution because a new federal mercury rule scheduled to take effect later this fall is simply not enough. The federal rule will allow coal plants to continue using older technology and purchase the right to continue polluting at high levels rather than forcing them to clean up their plants and protect our health and environment.

Illinois is not alone. Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, among others, have initiated mercury reduction proposals similar to the Illinois rule. Affordable, readily available technology already has been shown to reduce mercury pollution from coal plants by as much as 95 percent. We need to move forward now to protect the health of our children and future Illinoisans.

A large, diverse coalition of doctors, hospitals, public health officials, children's advocates, health associations and environmental groups throughout Illinois support the proposed rule before the IPCB. The fact that Ameren and Dynegy have already agreed to cut mercury pollution from their power plants by 90 percent in the coming years confirms this is the right thing to do. It's time to codify their agreements in law, so companies that haven't accepted their corporate responsibility will do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "FD Leary". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "y".

Fredric D. Leary, MD
Chair of the Board