

Business, Labor, Coal Industry Coalition Supports Bipartisan Move to Cut Mercury Emissions from Power Plants by 86%

Harrisburg (April 18)-- A coalition of business, labor and coal industry groups announced its support for bipartisan legislation in the Senate and House that would dramatically reduce mercury emissions from power plants in a way that protects public health and does not threaten Pennsylvania jobs.

“We support this common sense approach to reducing mercury emissions from power plants because it will not only reduce mercury emissions affecting Pennsylvania by 86 percent, but it also gives power plants an incentive to over-control emissions in a cost-effective way that protects jobs and electric customers in Pennsylvania,” said Douglas L. Biden, President, Electric Power Generation Association.

Senate Bill 1201, sponsored by Senators Mary Jo White (R-Venango) and Ray Musto (D-Luzerne) and House Bill 2610, proposed by Rep. David Reed (R-Indiana) and Rep. Tom Tigue (D-Luzerne), were introduced this week.

The coalition supporting the proposal includes the:

- United Mine Workers of America;
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers;
- Pennsylvania Coal Association;
- Electric Power Generation Association;
- Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry;
- Pennsylvania Chemical Industry Council;
- Associated Petroleum Industries of Pennsylvania; and the
- Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association.

“This legislation will require electric generators to invest an estimated \$360 million annually in new air pollution controls, covering 90 percent of the power plants in Pennsylvania according to DEP, creating more new jobs,” said Edward D. Yankovich, International Vice President, United Mine Workers of America. “But unlike the rule proposed by the Department of Environmental Protection, this legislation would not force the early retirement of more than 30 Pennsylvania power plants and a switch to coal mined in other states.”

The Department of Environmental Protection has proposed a rule that would require a 90 percent reduction in mercury emissions and an additional investment of \$1 billion, but would provide no additional health benefits, according to information developed by the United Mine Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

According to DEP, the health impacts of mercury emissions from power plants on people are indirect. The health threat comes from people eating fish containing mercury, not from people breathing in mercury in the air.

“Studies show that 80 percent of the mercury consumed by Americans comes from ocean and saltwater fish that would not be affected by reducing U.S. utility mercury emissions,” said Donald Siegel, International Vice President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. “In fact, modeling studies show there is virtually no difference between adopting the rule in this legislation and zeroing out all power plant emissions. We therefore doubt that a rule like DEP would adopt would have any impact on fish advisories or mercury exposure.”

A recent study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control concluded women and young children, the most susceptible parts of our population, do not have a level of mercury in their blood that even approaches a level which would cause adverse health effects.

The risk of power plants switching to coal mined in other states is very real. “Pennsylvania coal has twice the mercury content of coal from other states,” according to George L. Ellis, President of the Pennsylvania Coal Association. “If DEP’s rule is adopted, power generators may have no choice but to consider switching to out-of-state coal with a much lower mercury content to meet the regulation, and good-paying coal mining jobs will go with it.”

There is also a concern about the impact of unnecessary controls on electric utility customers. “A DEP rule requiring an investment of a billion dollars for no discernible benefit and adds new costs at power plants which have to be paid by someone,” said Gene Barr, Vice President Political and Regulatory Affairs, Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry. “And we are very concerned that ‘someone’ will be homeowners and businesses who will see their electric bills increase unnecessarily if the Senate and House proposals are not adopted.”

For more background on proposals to reduce mercury emissions from power plants, visit the www.PaEnergyNews.com website.

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