

Sen. Mary Jo White: Letter to editor on Mercury Rising editorial.

Text of May 1 letter.

May 1, 2006
Letters to the Editor
Philadelphia Daily News
Box 7788
Philadelphia, PA 19101

Dear Editor:

If you wonder why more good people don't run for the legislature, consider your editorial (Mercury Rising) Exhibit A. You ought to be ashamed.

I resent your insinuation that I introduced this bill in response to campaign contributions rather than the need for clean air, clean water and a sound economy. At some point, your paper needs to stop acting like a stenographer for the DEP and fear-mongering organizations, and start acting like a responsible publication. Your readers deserve better.

The United States is the only nation in the world to regulate mercury emissions. Pennsylvania generators must reduce emissions by 86%. But even if all power plants in the United States eliminated their mercury, it would only account for a 1% global reduction. That is because half of all mercury pollution comes from natural sources, like volcanoes and geysers, which don't respond well to government permits.

Mercury poses no danger from inhalation - it must be ingested, and even then people must consume fish in extraordinary amounts before it could potentially pose a threat to human health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, women and children in the U.S. do not have mercury blood levels that would even pose an adverse health effect. In fact, contrary to your claims, there are no birth defects and developmental disorders in children that have been attributable to mercury exposure from power plants.

No one is saying "do nothing". Senate Bill 1201 will require significant mercury reductions. The argument that Pennsylvania generators will simply purchase allowances from other states falls apart when you look at DEP's own data. Fully 90% of all generating capacity in Pennsylvania will have controls in place by 2015 to control SO₂, NO_x and mercury. The real question is why does DEP want to impose a more costly plan that will provide no added environmental benefit to Pennsylvanians and raise the cost of electricity for residents? I fought for legislation to limit the ability of utilities to terminate service during winter; where are the activists now that costs could go even higher?

I am a conservationist, a person of faith, and a grandmother - concerned about the health of our children just as much as the next person. Callous, unfounded attacks don't help any of us try to find the best way to clean up our environment and protect our children's future.

Get the facts next time before condemning lawmakers again.

Sincerely,
Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee