

## TAKE ACTION! EPA's Mercury Rule & Your Health

On March 16th, 2011 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a long-awaited rule to set national standards for mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can cause a variety of health problems from learning disorders to heart attacks. Luckily, this rule—which was 20 years in the making—will require coal plants to significantly lower their mercury emissions. Due to the severe public health impacts of mercury and other toxic air pollution, this proposed rule stands to cause dramatic improvements in air and water quality as well as the economy. According to EPA, the rule will:



“Prevent 91 percent of the mercury in coal burned in power plants from being emitted to the air; Reduce acid gas emissions from power plants by 91 percent; and [reduce] sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from power plants by 55 percent.”

The positive health impacts of this proposal will lead to monetary benefits as high as \$140 billion while the compliance costs are only around \$10.9 billion. This means that **for every \$1 spent to reduce pollution we will see as much as \$14 in health benefits.**

- The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry states that one of the top sources of human exposure to mercury is through coal-fired power plants. **Coal plants are the single largest source of human-made mercury emissions.**
- Humans are exposed to the most toxic form of mercury (methyl-mercury) when it bio-accumulates in watersheds and enters our bodies through the fish we eat.
- **Mercury can lead to a variety of neurological problems in children from decreased motor visual development and vocabulary to severe cognitive impairment. In adults mercury can negatively impact dexterity, concentration, and memory, cause heart attacks and raise blood pressure.**
- Research from EPA and elsewhere shows that mercury exposure can have even greater impacts on certain groups of recreational and subsistence anglers including: Low-income Southeastern white populations; low-income southeastern African-Americans; low-income women and; Hispanics across the country.
- Low-income African-Americans and Hispanics living in the Southeast U.S. are particularly at risk from exposure to mercury – a loss of IQ as high as 12 points is attributable to this neurotoxin.
- These communities are particularly vulnerable: they stand to gain the most from EPA's mercury proposal.

According to EPA, each year the standards will prevent up to:

- 17,000 premature deaths, 11,000 heart attacks, 120,000 asthma attacks;
- 12,200 hospital & emergency room visits, 4,500 cases of chronic bronchitis;
- 5.1 million restricted activity days

### How you can take action

- Attend a public hearing or submit written comments telling EPA that you support this rule.
- Submit written comments through email to [a-and-r-docket@epa.gov](mailto:a-and-r-docket@epa.gov). Please put the following in your email's subject line: “Attention Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2009-0234”.
- There will be a public hearing in Atlanta, GA on May 26 from 9am to 5pm. You can sign up to speak by emailing or calling Ms. Pamela Garrett at EPA. Her email is [garrett.pamela@epa.gov](mailto:garrett.pamela@epa.gov) and her phone number is 919-541-7966.
- **To learn more specifics about how to get involved please visit <http://bit.ly/HgRule>**