

New U.S. mercury limits are tough; Illinois' rules unrealistic

January 13, 2006

Your Jan. 9 editorial urging that Michigan follow a proposal by the Illinois governor to require a 90% reduction in power plant mercury emissions by 2009 failed to recognize that the proposal is most likely impossible to achieve ("Mercury Limits: Illinois sets rules all Lakes states should copy"). Even if it were found to be technically possible, the additional reduction would provide an insignificant reduction in mercury levels in fish at a great cost to Michigan consumers.



Your readers should be aware:

- It is acknowledged in the scientific community that U.S. power plants contribute minimally to the levels of mercury in the environment. In 2004, the U.S. House Committee on Resources reported that, "estimates show only 1% of total world (mercury) emissions comes from U.S. utilities." The committee concluded: "Reducing emissions from U.S. energy sources would have negligible, if any, effect on mercury levels in fish," which is the primary means of human exposure.
- A 2004 study commissioned by Detroit Edison and other Michigan utilities concludes that Michigan utilities contribute, on average, less than 3% to mercury deposition in the state.
- The July 2005 "National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals" by the Centers for Disease Control states: "Blood mercury levels in both the 1999-2000 and 2001-2002 subsamples are below levels considered associated with known health effects."

We share your concern about mercury in the environment. Detroit Edison agrees that human exposure to mercury should be reduced. We are committed to cutting mercury emissions from our power plants. The current EPA rule requires a 70% reduction, an aggressive but achievable goal that can be accomplished without requiring our customers to pay heavily for additional reductions that would have virtually no impact on human exposure. Further, it is required to be achieved in a timeframe that will drive technology improvements that will hopefully minimize cost increases to our customers.

Based on recent tests at our power plants, a 90% reduction in annual mercury emissions across our fleet of plants would not be achieved by simply installing activated carbon injection, a technology that is being aggressively promoted.

Detroit Edison will spend \$218 million in 2006 on emissions reduction projects and up to an additional \$2.2 billion between 2007 and 2018 to achieve a 70% reduction in mercury emissions as well as major reductions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and particulates.

On top of these costs, we calculate that Detroit Edison customers would pay \$115 million more per year if

we were to install additional equipment to achieve annual mercury emission reductions approaching 90%. With Michigan's current weak economy, businesses and families can ill afford to pay for expensive environmental controls without receiving real and meaningful benefits.

Skiles Boyd

Vice President, Environmental Affairs

DTE Energy

Safer limits in order

Thank you for your strong support of mercury limits. It is so shortsighted of our legislators to think that we can't afford to reduce mercury emissions by 2009 but we can afford to have young children and others suffer the consequences of mercury poisoning. When will we ever learn?

Presently, I eat almost no fish because so much of it is of questionable safety and because figuring out which fish is safe to eat is so complicated. Is it farmed? Where did it come from? Is it contaminated? Is it endangered?

Joanne M. Cantoni

Farmington Hills

Strong, reasonable goals

Your editorial unfairly criticized the U.S. EPA's first-ever rule to remove mercury from power plants. The Bush administration's approach will not only cut nationwide mercury emissions by 70%, it will do so in a manner that makes the air cleaner and healthier while maintaining energy security and strong economic growth. The rule will also achieve an average reduction in mercury deposition in the Great Lakes region of more than 70%.

Illinois stands to gain little benefit beyond the EPA's mercury rule. While Illinois has authority under the Clean Air Act to go it alone, its aggressive timetable for mercury emission reductions could lead to shutdowns in coal-fired power plants and increases in consumer costs as power companies scramble to install new controls or switch to a different form of fuel. Our rules will virtually eliminate elevated levels of mercury that American women and children may face solely because of U.S. power plants. The Bush administration has a strong, comprehensive set of rules to protect the public health and environment from mercury, soot and smog.

Bill Wehrum

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