

DRAFT

Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee

Suite 300, 777 North Capitol Street, N.E. Washington , D.C. 20002-4239 202-962-3358 Fax: 202-962-3203

May 24, 2006

Richard D. Langford, Chair
Virginia Air Pollution Control Board
c/o Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 10009
Richmond, Virginia 23240

Dear Chair Langford,

I am writing on behalf of the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) regarding implementation of EPA's Clean Air Mercury Rule and the Virginia Clean Smokestacks Act (HB1055/SB651) in Virginia. MWAQC is certified by the governors of Maryland and Virginia and the mayor of the District of Columbia to develop regional air pollution control strategies for the Washington, DC-MD-VA region. MWAQC members support provisions that restrict trading of mercury by electric generating units in nonattainment areas.

It is well known that mercury is a powerful neurotoxin that accumulates in the food chain and can cause damage to the brain and nervous system when ingested. In fact, because of methylmercury contamination, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Health have issued fish consumption advisories to the public due to elevated concentrations of mercury. According to STAPPA/ALAPCO, in January 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that nearly 8 percent of women of childbearing age are exposed to mercury levels that are above those considered safe for a developing fetus. More recently, EPA researchers have indicated that, based on examinations of umbilical cord blood, the estimate is closer to 15 percent.

In view of the dangers associated with exposure to mercury, MWAQC believes it is extremely important that Virginia take aggressive steps to reduce emissions of this pollutant from utilities. Further, we are concerned that allowing trading of mercury emissions between utilities could lead to serious "hotspot" problems around the region, endangering the population living in that area and the surrounding environment. While mercury emissions can travel great distances, some of the pollutant can also be deposited near its source. According to a report of the New Jersey Mercury Task Force, which examined local emissions, models, and other studies, "it is likely that approximately half of the mercury that is deposited in New Jersey comes from relatively nearby sources." Thus, the concern about local sources causing local mercury hotspots must not be dismissed.

We strongly urge the Air Pollution Control Board to promulgate a mercury control regulation, as was proposed in January, that restricts trading of mercury allowances between regulated utilities.

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson, Chair
Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee