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GOVERNOR

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Governor Ehrlich Announces Bold Air Quality Improvement Plan

BETHESDA – Marylanders will breathe cleaner air in coming years under a bold new air quality plan unveiled today by Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. Pollutants being emitted from power plants will be cut extensively under the Maryland Clean Power Rule – the most sweeping air pollution control measure enacted in Maryland history.

Speaking at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, surrounded by students of an advanced placement environmental science course, Governor Ehrlich outlined how his initiative will cut Maryland power plant emissions up to 85 percent depending on the pollutant, five years ahead of requirements set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Air Interstate Rule.

“The Maryland Clean Power Rule, combined with our historic Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act, makes Maryland a national leader in air and water quality,” said Governor Ehrlich. “Our plan dramatically improves year round controls on power plant emissions and will take bold action to reduce harmful mercury levels. In addition to cleaning the air we breathe, the rule will reduce nitrogen pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay, 30 percent of which comes from the air. Simply put, my Administration's air and water quality strategy is making Maryland a cleaner and safer place to live.”

The Maryland Clean Power Rule:

- Imposes emission rate limits on Maryland's six largest coal-fired electric power plants that contribute to ozone, particle, regional haze, and acid rain pollution;
- Reduces mercury emissions from Maryland's six largest coal-fired electric power plants;

- Prohibits Maryland power plants from buying out-of-state emissions allowances (trading credits) to meet state emission rate limits.

Maryland's six largest power plants account for approximately 95 percent of the air pollution emitted from Maryland's coal-fired power plants. Governor Ehrlich's Clean Power Rule will cut nitrogen oxides by 45,000 tons each year, a 69 percent reduction, while sulfur dioxide emissions will fall 85 percent or about 205,000 tons per year. Mercury will be reduced 70 percent or roughly 1,400 pounds per year.

According to an EPA analysis, Governor Ehrlich's rule, combined with regional reductions from upwind power plants, will prevent more than 390 premature deaths in Maryland linked to fine particle air pollution exposure.

"The Maryland Clean Power Rule is key to bringing Maryland into compliance with the new health-based air quality standards for ozone and fine particulates," said Maryland Department of the Environment Secretary Kendl P. Philbrick. "It strengthens Maryland's position as a progressive leader in air quality management and controls. Earlier measures have led to remarkable results. We've cut local emissions from vehicles, paint and other everyday products by 40 percent since 1990. Meaning, Maryland's air is cleaner now than it was 20 years ago. But it is still not enough, which is why Governor Ehrlich's plan is so crucial."

The Maryland Clean Power Rule surpasses the Clean Air Interstate Rule developed by EPA and existing work with the Ozone Transport Commission, a coalition of northeastern states partnering on air pollution issues. Under the rule, Maryland will meet air quality standards faster than under EPA rules. The local controls are also needed to ensure Maryland meets its federal goals for 8-hour ozone and fine particulate standards by 2010.

Largely because of pollution from excess nitrogen and phosphorus, the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal rivers remain on the Clean Water Act's list of impaired waters. The rule will benefit the Chesapeake Bay by reducing nitrogen from the air by up to 900,000 pounds per year, which is a significant step towards achieving Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Agreement commitment. The Maryland Clean Power Rule is expected to be published in the Maryland Register in early January 2006. The Maryland Department of Environment will hold public hearings in early spring of 2006.

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