

JULY 7, 2003

**BIPARTISAN COALITION OF 138 HOUSE MEMBERS QUESTION BUSH
ADMINISTRATION PROPOSAL TO WEAKEN CLEAN AIR ACT**

**PRESIDENT BUSH'S PLAN WOULD INCREASE MERCURY EMISSIONS AND WOULD
JEOPARDIZE PUBLIC HEALTH, PREGNANT WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In a bipartisan letter organized by U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, 138 House members warned that President Bush's Clear Skies proposal "could weaken protections that exist in current law regarding power plants' emissions of mercury."□□

Schakowsky said, "Families across the country should be alarmed that President Bush is directing Congress to weaken the Clean Air Act and, as a result, putting at risk the public health of millions of children and pregnant mothers who would be exposed to even greater levels of mercury.□ Both Democrats and Republicans in Congress oppose this ill conceived plan and will work to strengthen, not dismantle, our environmental laws."

□ In the letter to the President, the bipartisan coalition wrote, "The net effect of the current draft of 'Clear Skies' could be to increase mercury emissions compared to the limits in current law."

"Mercury emissions jeopardize the environment and public health, especially the health of young children," They added.□ "Mercury is a potent bioaccumulative neurotoxin, which can hurt a developing fetus and young child.□ In July 2000, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences agreed with Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) estimate that 60,000 newborns annually may be at risk for neurodevelopmental effects from in utero exposure to mercury."

"This month, the Centers for Disease Control released a study that determined that almost eight percent of the roughly 61 million American women of child-bearing age had blood levels of mercury exceeding the precautionary standard set by the EPA," they continued.

The members concluded, "Progress in reducing public exposure to mercury depends upon strengthening the current Clean Air Act requirements for mercury.□ We hope to work with you to ensure that human health is protected, by preventing those requirements from being weakened."

The Bush Administration's plan delays any mercury reductions to 2010 and then allows 26 tons in 2010 and 15 tons through 2018.□ By contrast, the current rules would be effective in 2008, and could reduce power plant mercury emissions to a little as five tons

per year.

Below is the full text of the letter to President Bush:

{Attached}

June 30, 2003

*President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500*

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Dear President Bush:

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We commend your acknowledgment of the many public health and environmental problems associated with the emissions of electric power plants.

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We are concerned that the current draft of the "Clear Skies" proposal could weaken protections that exist in current law regarding power plants' emissions of mercury. If the current proposal became law, it could delay reductions in mercury emissions from the electric generating sector beyond the current law's 2008 deadline. Moreover, power plant mercury emissions under the current proposal could be three times the level expected if the current law is enforced. As you noted, power plants are the single largest source of mercury emissions in the United States. The net effect of the current draft of "Clear Skies" could be to increase mercury emissions compared to the limits in current law.

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Mercury emissions jeopardize the environment and public health, especially the health of young children. Mercury is a potent bioaccumulative neurotoxin, which can hurt a developing fetus and young child. In July 2000, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences agreed with Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) estimate that 60,000 newborns annually may be at risk for neurodevelopmental effects from in utero exposure to mercury. This month, the Centers for Disease Control released a study that determined that almost eight percent of the roughly 61 million American women of child-bearing age had blood levels of mercury exceeding the precautionary standard set by the EPA.

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Human exposure to mercury is primarily the result of eating fish contaminated with mercury. The number of states issuing warnings for mercury rose steadily from 27 states in 1993 to 44 states in 2002. In the past seven years, the number of advisories warning the public not to eat fish contaminated with mercury has more than doubled.

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Progress in reducing public exposure to mercury depends upon strengthening the current Clean Air Act requirements for mercury. We hope to work with you to ensure that human health is protected, by preventing those requirements from being weakened.