

WASHINGTON D.C. (October 5, 2011) – Today, Rep. Jan Schakowsky offered an amendment to H.R. 2681, the “Cement Sector Regulatory Relief Act.” H.R. 2681 would indefinitely delay the EPA’s ability to reduce mercury emissions from cement kilns. Rep. Schakowsky’s amendment would include in the bill’s findings the scientific fact that mercury emitted from cement kilns is a potent neurotoxin that can damage the development of an infant’s brain. Rep. Schakowsky issued this statement after a failed vote on the amendment:

“My amendment would have simply included in the findings section of the bill the scientific fact that mercury released into the ambient air from cement kilns is a potent neurotoxin that can damage the development of an infant’s brain.

Mercury is one of the most harmful toxins in our environment. Forty-eight tons of mercury is pumped into our air each year, threatening one in six women nationwide with dangerous levels of mercury exposure. Pregnant women, infants, and young children are most vulnerable to mercury poisoning, which harms a developing child’s ability to walk, talk, read, write, and comprehend. Developing fetuses and children are especially at risk as even low-level mercury exposure can cause adverse health effects.

EPA analysis and peer-reviewed studies show that mercury leads to increased incidence of neurological disorders, increased incidence of learning disabilities, and increased incidences in developmental delay.

The EPA cement plant standards would reduce this major threat without undue burden to industry. The standards will lower the mercury exposure of more than 100,000 women of childbearing age in Illinois whose blood mercury levels exceed the recommended limit. H.R. 2681 patently ignores the scientifically-proven fact that mercury exposure inhibits brain development, especially in infants.

My colleagues across the aisle talk a lot about not wanting to burden the next generation with debt. Where is their concern with burdening the next generation with reduced brain capacity? If we are prepared to pass legislation that would jeopardize the health of children, we should be willing to acknowledge the scientific fact that EPA inaction poses a serious health risk.”

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