

Chicago, IL (April 20, 2012) -Today U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) joined students from St. Margaret Mary School in Rogers Park for a celebratory release of classroom-raised rainbow trout in Rogers Park in observance of Earth Day. The students raised the fish from eggs through a program with Trout Unlimited.

Rep. Schakowsky delivered remarks to commemorate Earth Day's 42nd anniversary and praised recent progress made in anti-mercury pollution efforts.

Other speakers included Peggy Finnegan

, principal of St. Margaret Mary School, Joel Brammeir, President/CEO of Alliance for the Great Lakes, Robert Kelter of the Environmental Law & Policy Center.

“When Earth Day began more than 40 years ago, it was about sounding an alarm. Today it’s about recognizing the strides we have made and facing ongoing challenges,” said **Rep.**

Schakowsky

. “We have taken great steps in Illinois, where in 2006 we passed standards to cut mercury pollution from our power plants by 90%. However, coal burning power plants across the country are still a major source of mercury pollution because the act of burning coal sends mercury into our environment. We need a strong national standard to prevent mercury from one state polluting another state.”

Despite efforts in Congress to block actions that prevent pollution, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard (MATS) in December, 2011. MATS was required under the 1990 amendments to the CAA, and is the first-ever national standard to reduce mercury and other toxic air emissions from power plants.

Mercury can be dispersed through wind, traveling thousands of miles and causing pollution of land and water. It is absorbed by the plants and bacteria at the base of the food chain before it is absorbed by the digestive system and stored in the tissues of animals including insects, fish, song birds and people. In fish, mercury slows growth, impairs reproduction and at high concentrations can be fatal. In children, mercury impairs neurological development and can lead to serious cognitive issues and learning disabilities. It has also been linked to problems with the cardiovascular and immune systems. Women of childbearing age are advised against eating fish contaminated with mercury. Illinois has a statewide mercury advisory against women of childbearing age and children under 15 years old eating predator fish caught in our waters more than once a week.

Mercury pollution is preventable if power plant emissions are controlled. The cost of cleaning up power plants is minimal, especially when compared to the health benefits to humans and wildlife.

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