

Exhibit Number: 11

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EXHIBIT 11
DATE 2.4.05
HB 455

Testimony for HB 455, Reducing Mercury Pollution
House Natural Resources Committee, 2/4/05 Hearing
Prepared by Matt Leow

Mr. Chair, members of the Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the issue of mercury emissions for power plants and HB 455.

MontPIRG fully supports HB 455. MontPIRG has been working on mercury pollution for over a year. We participated in the EPA rule-making process last spring, and have provided input for the state's fish consumption advisory program.

Opponents of HB 455 will tell you that coal power should not be blamed for the mercury problem, and will point to natural sources. Indeed, it is tricky to trace the source of mercury. When mercury is found in fish, it doesn't come with an address of sender. However, we do know that the nation's power plants emit nearly 95,000 pounds annually, and in Montana, our power plants emit nearly 1,000 pounds a year. Because of the incredibly toxicity of mercury, these numbers should be alarming.

Now, back to the subject of natural sources. One of the coal industry's favorite examples of natural sources is forest fires. There are, indeed, numerous studies that show forest fires do release mercury into the atmosphere. Industry would like you to believe that this dwarfs the emissions from coal.

A study conducted at the National Forest Service fire lab in Missoula talks about this issue. Mainly, the study looked at what happens when certain fuels are burned, and how much mercury is released. It does talk briefly about the source of the mercury found in vegetation. Though "minor amounts of mercury are taken up through the xylem from mercury contained in the soil," the majority of the mercury found in vegetation comes from wet and dry deposition from the air. That brings us back to the problem of coal plants emitting thousands of pounds of mercury into the air annually. Forest fires, by and large, are thus merely re-releasing mercury that has been already been released into the air.

We know that coal is a major source of mercury pollution. The industry is poisoning our waterways and our food supply and putting the costs of that on society at large. This is called externalizing costs. Parents of developmentally disabled kids, local fishing industries, and all taxpayers are paying the hidden costs of the coal industry.

I ask you to stop this situation, and require the coal industry to do the responsible thing and prevent mercury emissions at their source. Please vote for HB 455.

Thank you again,

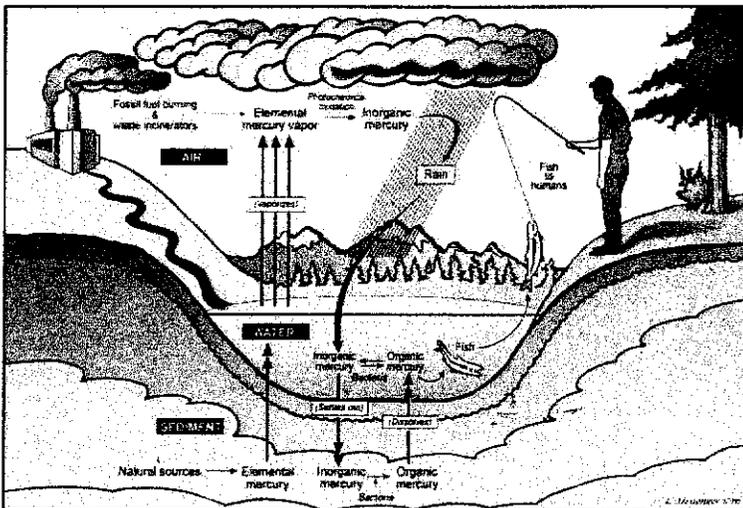
Matt Leow
Executive Director

Reduce Mercury Pollution: Vote Yes on HB 455

Mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants is contaminating our lakes, rivers and oceans. In 2003, a statewide fish consumption advisory was issued for all lakes and rivers in Montana because of mercury pollution. These advisories warn Montanans, especially children and pregnant women, against eating fish caught in these waters because of the serious health risks associated with mercury exposure.

The Clean Air Act requires that power plants use "maximum achievable control" technologies to reduce mercury pollution by 2008. In 2000, EPA's own scientists said faithful implementation of the law could achieve a 90 percent reduction from power plants using these technologies, cutting annual emissions from 48 tons to 5 tons. However, the EPA failed take action to protect public health last year. Instead, the agency bowed to industry pressure and opted for a plan that would allow many times more mercury emissions from power plants over the next decade.

In the wake of the EPA's failure to act in the interest of public health, state's are taking action to reduce mercury emissions. Montana should join states such as Wisconsin, Massachussets, and North Carolina, which have passed legislation to reduce mercury pollution from power plants. **HB 455 would require an 80 percent reduction in mercury emissions at all new power plants built in Montana and achieve an 80 percent reduction in all existing plants by 2010.**



COAL POWER: MONTANA'S #1 MERCURY POLLUTER

- Coal-fired power plants in the U.S. emitted nearly 95,000 pounds of mercury in 2000.
- In Montana, power plants are responsible for 92% of industrial mercury air emissions.
- **Nearly 1000 pounds of mercury is emitted by power plants in Montana annually.**
- Mercury emissions in Montana will increase if action is not taken. Montana ranks 2nd nationally for new coal-fired generation currently proposed.

MERCURY, FISH, AND HUMAN HEALTH

- Microorganisms convert mercury in the environment into methylmercury, a form that is especially toxic.
- Mercury is a bioaccumulative toxin, meaning it increases in concentration as it moves up the food chain.
- Humans are exposed to methylmercury primarily through the consumption of fish.
- Human exposure to methylmercury can cause serious health problems, especially for women of childbearing age and children.
- Mercury is a neurotoxin. Known health effects include mental retardation and learning disabilities, blindness, cerebral palsy, and other birth defects.
- According to EPA analysis of a Center for Disease Control study, **1 in 6 women of childbearing age in the United States have elevated levels of mercury in their bodies, putting more than 600,000 newborns at risk each year.**

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