

May 16, 2011

ATTN: Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2009-0234

Dear EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson,

As Latino leaders in the environmental, health and business communities, we write to applaud the EPA for its proposed Mercury and Air Toxics Rule. This rule would significantly cut toxic air pollution from power plants, a significant problem for millions of Latinos nationwide. As you work to finalize this rule, we urge you to keep the final rule as strong as the proposed version to protect communities across the country.

Latino children are three times more likely than Non-Hispanic White children to live in U.S. counties where air quality standards for criteria air pollutants are exceeded (31.4% vs. 10.6%). Nearly one third (31%) of Hispanic children live in counties where hazardous air pollutant concentrations exceed a 1 in 10,000 cancer risk level.<sup>i</sup>

Every year, coal-fired power plants pump nearly 50 tons of mercury into our air, exposing millions to high levels of the potent neurotoxin, which is especially dangerous for young children, nursing mothers and women of childbearing age. Mercury can cause death, cancer and brain damage, even in small amounts. It is hard to believe that despite longstanding scientific knowledge of the life-threatening effects of mercury nationwide, mercury has up until this point remained unregulated under the Clean Air Act.

New air pollution standards should reduce mercury emissions from power plants burning coal and oil by 91%, acid gas pollution by 91%, direct particulate matter (PM) emissions by 30% and sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by 53%, saving as many as 17,000 lives every year by 2015. These standards also will prevent up to 120,000 cases of childhood asthma and 11,000 cases of acute bronchitis among children every year.<sup>ii</sup>

For uninsured Latinos who often live in these highly exposed communities, the reality that these standards will avoid more than 12,000 emergency room and hospital visits means less out of pocket healthcare costs to already overburdened household budgets. Further, EPA projects that the proposed standards will create up to 31,000 short-term construction jobs and 9,000 long-term utility jobs. This job growth, combined with the fact that the standards are expected to prevent 850,000 lost work days every year make this proposal extremely important in today's job market.

Despite the benefits for all Americans, the coal industry and other polluters are working hard to weaken this proposal so that they may keep releasing mercury into the air from power plants, where it then rains down into rivers and lakes contaminating the fish we eat.

Latinos and other vulnerable communities should not be forced to pay the price for allowing polluters to dump toxic pollutants into our air. Our uninsured or underinsured should not have to choose between paying medical bills or living expenses, and our workers should not have to risk losing their jobs to allow allowing polluters free reign to dump toxic pollutants in to our air. We and all Americans deserve better.

We applaud the EPA for its strong standard and urge you to keep it just as strong in the final version of the Mercury and Air Toxics Rule. We look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Common Ground for Conservation  
Democracia Ahora  
National Latino Coalition on Climate Change  
Voces Verdes

Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas en Norteamérica (COFEM)  
National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA)  
Project Economic Refugee  
William C. Velazquez Institute

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2003 quoted in: [J Pediatr Health Care. 2007 Sep–Oct; 21\(5\): 307–314. doi: 10.1016/j.pedhc.2006.12.005.](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2006.12.005)

<sup>ii</sup> [EPA's Mercury and Air Toxics Rule: Bottom Lines and Background](#), NRDC Switchboard (Mar. 16, 2011)