

## Brady, Hoeffel, Clean Air Council Force EPA Field Hearings On Mercury Contamination (1/29/04)

PHILADELPHIA --- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced that it would hold field hearings in Philadelphia in late February on the Interstate Air Quality Rules and Utility Mercury Reductions Rule proposed by the Bush Administration. The announcement comes after Congressmen Robert A. Brady (PA-1) and Joseph M. Hoeffel (PA-13) wrote to the EPA urging hearings on the controversial changes in the regulations.

Working with the nationally recognized, Pennsylvania-based non-profit, The Clean Air Council, Brady and Hoeffel protested recent Environmental Protection Agency moves to reverse its determination of power plant mercury emissions as a toxic substance. This rollback would undo the requirement to apply tight new mercury controls by 2007.

Over the past several years, the Clean Air Council has documented the extent of mercury contamination in our region's air and rivers. According to a recent Clean Air Council study Pennsylvania ranks third in the nation for mercury air emissions and overall air toxin emissions from power plants. The study also found that the old and dirty grandfathered power plants nationwide released more than 91,000 pounds of toxic mercury and mercury compounds into the air-more than any other industrial source.

Writing separately, to EPA Administrator Michael O. Leavitt, the Congressmen pressed the case for EPA hearings in the Delaware Valley to address the disproportionate danger from mercury to their constituents.

"Mercury is a potent neurotoxin. It does greatest damage to the most vulnerable among us: children, infants and developing fetuses." Brady wrote in his January 20, 2004 letter. Brady urged EPA to hold local hearings where his constituents can testify. "I...urge you to hold at least one public hearing in EPA Region 3 on the recently issued mercury rules for electric power plants and to extend the public comment period on the rules by 30 days. In your effort to finalize regulations that have taken over a decade to develop, EPA should not limit the public's ability to participate by holding only one or two hearings, and by taking comment for only 60 days."

In his letter Hoeffel also urged that the EPA hold a field hearing. "A report by the Centers for Disease Control found that one in 12 women of childbearing age has mercury levels above the EPA's safe health threshold," Hoeffel wrote. "The people of Pennsylvania and the nation deserve the opportunity to be heard on the proposed regulation."

"Mercury pollution is an extremely important public health issue, and one that, unfortunately, impacts Pennsylvanians more than many other Americans. We are very glad that area residents will get every opportunity to voice their opinions on this issue," said Joseph Minott, Executive Director at Clean Air Council, a statewide environmental group. "Clean Air Council thanks Representatives Brady and Hoeffel for helping to bring these very important hearings to Philadelphia."