



June 24, 2004

For Immediate Release

Contact: Karen Hadden 512-797-8481

**Texas Increases Mercury Emissions and Leads the Nation in
Toxic Mercury from Power Plants for Third Year:
Reducing Health Risks is Urgent**

Technology Exists Today to Dramatically Cut Emissions

Austin, Texas –Yesterday the EPA announced new Toxic Release Inventory Data showing that Texas utilities released even more mercury to the air than either of the last two years. Utilities in Texas reported 9840 pounds of mercury and mercury compounds emitted into the air in 2002, up nearly 10% from 8968 pounds the previous year.

“Texas leads the nation in toxic mercury emissions from power plants for the third year in a row, with even more mercury pollution than before, which means more risk to our wildlife and to our children’s health” stated Karen Hadden, Executive Director of the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition.

Hadden urged citizens to send an editable letter to the EPA from www.seedcoalition.org. “It is very important that EPA continue hearing from citizens. Over half a million comments have been submitted, far outweighing any previous number. People are outraged that utilities are trying to buy their way out of cleaning up the toxic mercury that gets into fish and can result in brain damage in our children.”

“Texas is already the nation’s mercury hotspot, and we’re hot about being dumped on,” stated Hadden. “You or I would go to jail if we poisoned someone. Why should utilities be allowed to release mercury pollution that poisons our food and threatens our health?”

“Texas now has 12 mercury-based fish consumption advisories, for several species of fish in freshwater lakes and the entire Gulf of Mexico for king mackerel. Several studies show that reducing mercury leads to immediate local improvement, and reduced fish mercury levels,” stated Ed Parten, President of Texas Black Bass Unlimited.

Physician Lisa Doggett, with the Austin Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, stated "Mercury is a serious health threat, especially for pregnant women and young children. Exposure to mercury can impact the nervous system and lead to brain damage and learning disabilities. In 2002, the Centers for Disease Control found that one of every twelve women of childbearing age that was tested showed high levels of mercury, and 633,000 newborns are at risk for neurological impacts as a result." With Texas power plants emitting over 10% of the nation's mercury, it is likely that tens of thousands of newborns in Texas are at risk from mercury exposure.

"Two new coal-burning power plants are proposed for Texas. In terms of health, it makes more sense to pursue energy efficiency and renewable energy for the future, instead of coal plants that produce mercury and particle pollutants that are linked to over 1,100 deaths per year in Texas" stated Karen Hadden.

The Limestone Electric Generating Station (Limestone County) increased from 1100 pounds (2001) to 1800 pounds (2002) to become the largest emitter of toxic mercury in Texas. The next largest is the Monticello power plant in Mount Pleasant, which released 1324 pounds of mercury in 2002, up 11 pounds from the previous year. The Pirkey power plant in Longview reported 100 pounds in 2002, down 100 pounds from 2001.

"The EPA mercury comment period ends June 29. Toxic Release Inventory data has been released earlier some years, and it would have been helpful to have it available as a basis of comments." stated Tom "Smitty" Smith, Director of Public Citizen's Texas Office. "What the new data shows is that it's more important than ever that EPA enact strong rules that reduce mercury by 90% at all sources- with no trading of credits. Trading of a toxic has never before been allowed due to health risks, and it would be a terrible mistake to allow the utilities to buy their way out of mercury reductions."

"We're already the worst state in the nation for mercury pollution, and we call on the EPA and our Congressional Representatives to act to protect our health, not dump toxins on Texas."

has previously determined that under the Clean Air Act mercury could and should be reduced by 90% by 2008, and that the technology is available to do so. Instead the plan allows 5-6 more times the mercury, to be emitted for a decade longer.

Controlling for mercury using activated carbon injection has been estimated by the EPA to cost \$2-5 billion for all coal-burning power plants in the nation, which may turn out to be an overestimation based on the history of projected costs of other controls.

Citizen faxes can be sent to Congressional Representatives from www.seedcoalition.org.

Information is also available at www.HealthyFish.net.

Public Citizen and the Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition are non-partisan, non-profit public interest advocacy organizations.

Other sources of information:

Blake Kidd, TRI Coordinator, TCEQ (512) 239-1441
Morton Wakeland, USEPA (214) 665-8116

TRI Data Use Assistance (202)-566-0250

TRI Explorer <http://www.epa.gov/triexplorer/statefactsheet.htm>
EPA Texas fact sheet - http://www.epa.gov/cgi-bin/broker?view=STCO&trilib=TRIQ0&state=48&SFS=YES&_service=oiiaa&_program=exp_tri.sasmacr.tristart.macro ###