

CHESTER RIVER ASSOCIATION GRASSROOTS MERCURY CAMPAIGN

GOAL

To reduce mercury loads in fish by reducing mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants.

PROBLEM

Mercury is a by-product of coal-fired power plants. It travels by air to the Chester River, where it is deposited into the water. Along the way, it is converted into its most toxic form, methylmercury. As fish and aquatic creatures eat, they consume traces of mercury. The mercury does not pass through the animal but rather bio-accumulates in fish. The highest levels are found in the largest fish, and the mercury accumulates in the human body once the fish are eaten. Mercury is a toxin that causes a lack of coordination, attention deficit disorders, and lack of motor skill development. It affects children's developing brains and is particularly dangerous to pregnant women. Coal-fired power plants are responsible for 66% of the mercury pollution in Maryland.

METHOD

National Movement: The Riverkeeper Program has worked on both state and national levels to push policymakers and legislators to tighten regulations on smoke-stack emissions. As part of the Waterkeeper Alliance, CRA joined a national campaign to support legislation forcing coal-fired power plants to install low-cost scrubbers on smokestacks, reducing emissions by 70%. This work is ongoing. CRA is also working with the Waterkeeper Alliance in states across the nation to get a clean air bill before Congress.

Grassroots Campaign: In February and March, 2005 CRA collected more than 800 signatures in a local petition campaign aimed at reducing mercury and other pollutants from the seven coal-fired power plants in Maryland. The Riverkeeper testified on behalf of the bill, and CRA persuaded our own district's delegate to support the bill.

In the 2006 Maryland Legislative Session, The Chester River Association joined other environmental organizations to form the Healthy Air Act Coalition in order to pass the Healthy Air Act. In April 2006, Governor Robert L Ehrlich Jr. signed in to law the Healthy Air Act legislation that will insure the 6 dirtiest coal fired power plants in Maryland to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides, mercury, carbon-dioxide and sulfur - dioxide. As a whole the bill is the strongest power plant emissions legislation ever passed by any state in the Country.

