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More than 650,000 Speak Out in Support of Strong Mercury Safeguards

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today marks the end of a record-breaking public comment period for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). More than 650,000 Americans and over 200 environmental, public health, and associated organizations submitted comments in support of EPA's landmark proposed public health safeguard to cut mercury and other toxic air pollutants from power plants—the most comments ever received in support of an EPA rule.

EPA estimates that the proposed standard, commonly referred to as the “Mercury and Air Toxics Rule,” would reduce mercury pollution from power plants by 91 percent, and each year prevent 12,200 trips to the hospital and save 17,000 lives once it is implemented.

“More than 650,000 Americans have spoken out against mercury,” said Shelley Vinyard, Toxics Advocate for Environment America. “After decades of dirty energy lobbyists getting their way, EPA has finally issued a rule that is a major step toward clean air and healthy Americans. It’s no surprise that the public overwhelmingly supports it.”

EPA issued the proposed Mercury and Air Toxics Rule on March 16, 2011 and a final rule is expected in November of this year. This standard will significantly cut an array of toxic air pollutants, including mercury, arsenic, lead, and acid gases—which are linked to cancer, heart disease, neurological damage, birth defects, asthma attacks and even premature death. Exposure to mercury affects a child’s ability to walk, talk, read, write, and learn. EPA estimates that mercury pollution is so widespread that one in ten American women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her blood to put her baby at risk, should she become pregnant.

Coal-fired power plants are the single largest source of mercury, arsenic, and acid gas pollution. The coal industry and their allies in Congress have successfully blocked EPA from protecting public health by cutting mercury and other toxic air pollutants from power plants since 1990. They are now working to legislatively block or delay the proposed rule by including a dangerous amendment in the House of Representatives Interior Appropriations bill, which could be voted on as soon as the House returns from August recess.

“Our air and bodies are no place for toxic pollution,” said Vinyard. “While big polluters are already working to roll back and weaken this essential public health safeguard, it’s clear that people want cleaner air, healthier kids, and less toxic pollution dumped in our air and waterways. Environment America applauds EPA for cleaning up toxic air pollution, and we urge EPA to

stand its ground and set the strongest air toxics protections possible to defend public health and protect America's children from toxic mercury.”

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Environment America is the federation of 29 citizen-based state groups working for a cleaner, greener, healthier future. www.EnvironmentAmerica.org