

## **Approve mercury rules**

November 9, 2006

Illinois is one of 10 states that is taking steps to reduce airborne mercury to a much greater extent than the federal guidelines approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last year.

The Illinois Pollution Control Board last week issued a 4-to-0 decision upholding the mercury pollution reduction plan proposed by Gov. Rod Blagojevich in January. Under the governor's plan, coal-fired power plants in Illinois will be required to install modern pollution-control equipment that will reduce toxic mercury emissions by 90 percent by June 30, 2009.

In announcing its decision, the pollution control board said that the mercury proposal is "technically feasible and economically reasonable." The decision came after 18 days of hearings; the board received more than 7,000 public comments and entered more than 100 exhibits into the record.

Now, the decision goes before the Illinois General Assembly's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, a 12-member bipartisan panel that has the power to veto the proposal. JCAR will meet Nov. 14 to comply with the Nov. 17 deadline that was set by the U.S. EPA for those states that wish to pass more stringent mercury rules.

The Star urges the legislative committee to approve the mercury rules so that they can be authorized in Illinois. This state needs to go beyond the federal rules to protect its citizens from mercury, an aggressive neurotoxin that harms fetal brain development. The federal EPA says that most airborne mercury in our region comes from coal-powered electric plants. Illinois has the country's fourth-highest number of mercury "hot spots," found mostly in bodies of water within 30 miles of coal-powered plants. Already, state health officials say there should be limits on fish consumption, especially for pregnant women. This should be a special concern in our Southland due to the proximity of four coal-powered plants in Will County.

Time is of the essence in making sure that these mercury reductions are approved. This is an important public health issue in Illinois and JCAR needs to act so that mercury pollution can be reduced in our state.