



Wisconsin's
Environmental Decade

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, May 29, 2002

CONTACT: Marc Looze or Rich Bogovich,
Decade, 608-251-7020 or 608-347-1714
Eric Uram, Sierra Club, 608-257-4994

NEW EPA DATA SHOWS WISCONSIN ELECTRIC UTILITIES NUMBER 1 IN STATE FOR TOXIC MERCURY, NUMBER 2 FOR TOTAL TOXIC AIR EMISSIONS

Wisconsin Power Plants Also Rank 3rd in the Nation for Dioxin

Madison - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released its latest numbers on toxic emissions, which show that electric utilities were the single biggest source for Wisconsin air emissions of mercury and ranked second to paper companies in terms of overall toxic emissions. The announcement comes as EPA and the Administration is pushing the President's "Clear Skies" power plant initiative, which would significantly weaken safeguards against this pollution.

The most startling information may be that Wisconsin's electric utilities collectively ranked third in the nation for emissions of dioxin and dioxin-like compounds, which are known to cause cancer in humans at very low doses. Only Virginia's and Florida's utilities emitted more than Wisconsin's. [*For more information on the health effects of dioxin, contact Dr. Robert Moore, associate scientist at the UW-Madison School of Pharmacy, 608-265-2531.*] Wisconsin and fifteen other states ranked ahead of Florida in mercury emissions from utilities by emitting more than 2,000 pounds of the pollutant, which is known to affect the development of a child's brain and nervous system.

Four of the top five power plants in terms of highest overall toxic air emissions (out of 19 reporting) are Wisconsin Energy power plants, led by the Port Washington and Oak Creek plants, the only two in the state to emit more than one million pounds of toxic substances.

Wisconsin Energy's Oak Creek and Pleasant Prairie plants ranked second and fourth, respectively, in terms of overall toxic emissions to surface waters and land. Pleasant Prairie was the top power plant in terms of emitting mercury and mercury compounds, and the Oak Creek plant with sixth.

More dioxin and dioxin-like compounds were emitted in Oak Creek than in all but four other areas of Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Energy power plant emitted 1.50 grams and Wabash Alloys 1.79 for a total of 3.29 grams. However, the biggest single source of dioxin in southeastern Wisconsin was the Pleasant Prairie plant at Kenosha, with 2.05 grams. Higher emissions were reported in Sheboygan (4.1), Green Bay/De Pere (6.32), Portage (6.75) and La Crosse (28.0).

"The information released today shows that Wisconsin electric utilities are the biggest mercury polluters in the state and some of the biggest in the nation," said Marc Looze, Mercury Campaign Director for Wisconsin's Environmental Decade. "It's time to require strict cuts in mercury pollution from power plants."

"This shows Wisconsin power plants need to clean up their act," said Eric Uram, Midwest Regional Representative for the Sierra Club. "Power plants aren't doing anything on their own, so we need to require reductions on the mercury and cancer-causing pollution utilities now put in the air we breathe everyday."

People are exposed to mercury primarily by eating fish contaminated when airborne mercury deposits in the water. In 2001, mercury contamination forced 44 states to issue fish advisories, warning anglers to limit their consumption of some fish and not to eat others at all. In the past seven years, advisories

--more--

for mercury have increased 149%. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 10% of women of childbearing age who were tested for mercury exposure measured above EPA's safe level. All of these impacts are in addition to new peer-reviewed scientific studies that conclude that power plant pollution plays a role in causing asthma and lung cancer.

The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) is the nation's premier database of information on how much toxic pollution is released each year by various industries. The 2000 data released today shows that electric utilities were the biggest air polluters in the U.S. that year.

Clear Skies would limit power plants to emitting 15 tons of mercury into the air by 2018. According to internal EPA documents (available at www.cleartheair.org), however, fully enforcing the current Clean Air Act would allow only 5 tons of mercury into the air, and would go into effect a full decade earlier. In addition, the President's plan would not limit any toxics other than mercury, unlike the ongoing EPA rulemaking that it would probably supplant. Finally, it would institute a "cap and trade" program for mercury emissions with no protections for those living near power plants, even though Congress has thus far never allowed trading in toxic substances due to their lethal nature.

"There are still serious questions about this pollution that neither the electric utility industry nor EPA have answered, even as the Bush administration is moving forward with Clear Skies," said Tom Natan, Research Director of the National Environmental Trust and author of a Clear the Air analysis of the new TRI data. "They have not examined potential long-term risk to children, the elderly, and people with respiratory illness. They have not explored the effects of exposure to multiple pollutants at the same time. And they haven't analyzed how power plant toxic chemical emissions help form fine particle pollution. These are all questions that deserve to be addressed before gutting current law."

For more findings of the analysis, please see the attached fact sheet. For the complete analysis, please see www.cleartheair.org

#

The Wisconsin power plants with the highest overall toxic air emissions (out of 19 reporting) are:

1. Port Washington (Wisc. Energy)	1,522,418 pounds
2. Oak Creek (Wisc. Energy)	1,263,094 pounds
3. French Island, La Crosse (Xcel Energy)	639,108 pounds
4. Valley, Milwaukee (Wisc. Energy)	444,015 pounds
5. Pleasant Prairie, Kenosha (Wisc. Energy)	430,818 pounds
6. Manitowoc Public Utilities	343,822 pounds
7. Madison Gas & Electric	295,319 pounds

The Wisconsin power plants with the highest overall toxic emissions to surface waters and land are:

1. Pulliam, Green Bay (Wisc. Public Service)	319,056 pounds
2. Oak Creek (Wisc. Energy)	199,254 pounds
3. Weston, Rothschild (Wisc. Public Service)	184,319 pounds
4. Pleasant Prairie, Kenosha (Wisc. Energy)	122,483 pounds
5. Columbia, Portage (Alliant)	87,603 pounds
6. Nelson Dewey, Cassville (Alliant)	34,632 pounds

The Wisconsin power plants with the highest air emissions of mercury and mercury compounds are:

1. Pleasant Prairie, Kenosha (Wisc. Energy)	580.0 pounds
2. Columbia, Portage (Alliant)	522.5 pounds
3. Alma (Dairyland Power Co-op)	221.0 pounds
4. Edgewater, Sheboygan (Alliant)	219.8 pounds
5. Weston, Rothschild (Wisc. Public Service)	150.6 pounds
6. Oak Creek (Wisc. Energy)	130.0 pounds

The Wisconsin power plants with the highest air emissions of dioxin and dioxin-like compounds are:

1. French Island, La Crosse (Xcel Energy)	28.00 grams
2. Columbia, Portage (Alliant)	6.75 grams
3. Edgewater, Sheboygan (Alliant)	4.10 grams
4. Bay Front, Ashland (Xcel Energy)	3.00 grams
5. Pleasant Prairie, Kenosha (Wisc. Energy)	2.05 grams
6. Oak Creek (Wisc. Energy)	1.50 grams