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**NATIONAL MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH GROUPS SUE EPA
TO PREVENT FUTURE MERCURY EXPOSURE**
Historic Collaboration Intended to Prevent Silent, Irreversible Brain Injuries to Children

Washington, D.C., June 14, 2005 – Four leading medical, nursing and public health groups, representing more than 300,000 public health professionals, today filed a challenge to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) power plant mercury rule. The plaintiffs include Physicians for Social Responsibility, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Nurses Association and the American Public Health Association.

The medical and health groups, represented by John Suttles and Marily Nixon of the Southern Environmental Law Center, are filing a 'motion for intervention' into the mercury litigation initiated by environmental organizations and 13 state attorneys general. The groups are filing the new lawsuit in response to the mercury rule's clear threat to public health.. Physicians, nurses, and other public health professionals will ask the federal courts to overturn the weak mercury rule to protect Americans' health. (Copies of the filed legal documents and state-specific fish advisories will be posted on www.mercuryaction.org on June 14.)

Many Americans are exposed to unsafe levels of mercury from environmental sources, including power plant emissions, by eating contaminated fish. EPA investigators have estimated that over 600,000 newborns are born each year overexposed to unhealthy mercury levels *in utero*. According to widely accepted scientific research, mercury is a potent neurotoxicant that can cause developmental and learning disabilities, reduced IQ, and impaired motor skills in children, and altered sensation, impaired hearing and vision, and motor disturbances in adults linked directly to exposure from eating contaminated fish.

Mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants make up more than 40% of all emissions into the U.S. environment, the largest source of uncontrolled mercury pollution in the U.S.

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The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to make public health its first and only priority, and the law mandates that these plants reduce their mercury pollution by up to 90 percent of current emission levels by 2008.

Unfortunately, the U.S. EPA's final mercury rule delays significant mercury reductions for 10 to 15 years longer than the federal Clean Air Act requires. The rule also substitutes an inappropriate "cap-and-trade" scheme for strong technology-based pollution control standards, also required under the Clean Air Act. This proposed trading scheme threatens individual communities with toxic mercury 'hot spots,' local areas of higher mercury concentrations that could result in dangerous levels of human exposure.

"Our nation's health and safety is at stake. The EPA can help prevent future brain impairment in America's children, by strengthening and enforcing reasonable limits on mercury emissions from power plants and educating consumers about avoiding fish high in mercury," said Susan West Marmagas, MPH, Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility's environmental health program.

In implementing a seriously flawed mercury rule, the EPA ignored the counsel of its own Children's Health Public Advisory Committee and ignored nearly 700,000 overwhelmingly negative public comments during the recent public comment period. The EPA also ignored the annual economic costs of methyl mercury toxicity attributable to mercury from American power plants. Researchers at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine estimate the annual cost from lost productivity associated with IQ impairment from methylmercury to be \$1.3 billion (in year 2000 dollars. Source: *Environmental Health Perspectives. Public health and economic consequences of methyl mercury toxicity to the developing brain.* Trasande, Landrigan and Schecter).

The loss of intelligence continues throughout the lifetimes of exposed children. If not addressed, the silent but significant public health threat associated with mercury pollution will diminish the economic competitiveness of the United States' population. Exposed children will likely need more time and attention from their parents, thus impacting the parents' economic productivity. Some children will likely require costly special education. --more--

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"Infants and young children are at highest risk of injury from a mercury-contaminated environment because their brains are still rapidly developing," said Katherine Shea, MD, MPH, of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "The EPA has failed to take the most protective actions available in reducing mercury exposure to children and women."

"Many young children exposed to mercury before birth will suffer subtle but irreversible brain damage. Preventing this tragedy, which affects not only families but entire communities, should be a national priority," said ANA President Barbara A. Blakeney, MS, RN.

"This new EPA rule will result in excess mercury emissions and increased exposure over a longer period. We must take aggressive action to address this serious health threat," said Georges Benjamin, MD, FACP, executive director of the American Public Health Association.

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) is a physician-led organization with more than 31,000 health professional and general members. PSR advocates for public health policies that promote health and well-being. Since 1991, PSR has supported education and legislative initiatives linking environmental quality and public health. To further its mission, PSR partners with a network of 60 state chapters and 50 student chapters at schools of medicine and public health. <http://www.mercuryaction.org>

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

<http://www.aap.org>

The American Nurses Association (ANA) is the only full-service professional organization representing the nation's entire registered nurse population. The ANA represents the interests of the nation's 2.7 million registered nurses through its 54 constituent state and territorial associations and more than 150,000 members. <http://www.nursingworld.org>

The American Public Health Association, the oldest organization of public health professionals, represents more than 50,000 members from over 50 public health occupations.

<http://www.apha.org>