



MICHIGAN REPORT

REPORT QUESTIONS MERCURY STANDARDS

Michigan's proposal to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent will do little to improve the state's environment or the health of residents, said a report released Wednesday by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

But state officials said the report both neglected current technology and used questionable studies to reach its conclusions.

The report, **Assessing Stricter Mercury Controls in Michigan**, said only about 2 percent of the mercury deposited in the state annually comes from the coal-fired power plants that are the target of the new standard.

"The reduction target of 90 percent is arbitrary; it is not based on the risk of exposure, the availability of emission control technology or the cost-effectiveness of emissions reductions," said Diane Katz, the Mackinac Center's director of science, environment and technology policy and co-author of the report. "The state would do better to postpone mercury control requirements that exceed the federal standards and cooperate with neighboring states and the Environmental Protection Agency to better define the risks associated with mercury exposures. We need to improve our understanding of the interplay between mercury emissions, depositions and bioaccumulation."

The new rules would require coal-fired power plants to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent by 2015.

The report argued that power plants have

been shown not to be a significant source of mercury and that recent studies show few children in Michigan or nationally are being affected by mercury at current environmental levels.

But Bob McCann, spokesperson for the Department of Environmental Quality, said studies in fact show mercury to be a dangerous element. "Mercury is a very potent neurotoxin," he said. And he said the department's models show coal-fired power plants account for 45 percent of the mercury deposited in the state, not the 2 percent cited in the report.

The report also argued that the standard called for in the new rules cannot be achieved with current emissions cleaning technology.

But Mr. McCann said a new power plant in Presque Isle is already using technology that will bring about the mercury emissions reductions the state is seeking. "Not only are people going to be able to do it by 2015 but they can do it now," he said. "As technology improves it will be more affordable."

Mr. McCann said the proposal is still working through the rules process and will be designed to meet the emissions goals without increasing electric rates in the state.

But he said the EPA standards "were far too little too late" and are being superceded by a number of states, not just Michigan. And he said some states are looking for the additional reductions as early as 2008.