



Connecticut Bureau of Air Management, Carmine DiBattista  
Maine Bureau of Air Quality Control, James Brooks  
Massachusetts Division of Air Quality Control, Nancy Seidman  
New Hampshire Air Resources Division, Kenneth Colburn  
New Jersey Office of Air Quality Management, John Elston  
New York Division of Air Resources, Robert Warland  
Rhode Island Office of Air Resources, Stephen Majkut  
Vermont Air Pollution Control Division, Richard Valentinetti

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**NEW NESCAUM REPORT SHOWS MERCURY**

**CONTROLS NOW FEASIBLE**

**US EPA Urged To Act**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 6, 2000) – A new report released today by the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management (NESCAUM) demonstrates that technologies to dramatically reduce mercury emissions from power plants can be rapidly deployed if required by US EPA. The report entitled “*Environmental Regulation and Technology Innovation: Controlling Mercury Emissions from Coal-Fired Boilers*” uses a series of detailed case studies to show that pollution-control requirements spark the rapid development and installation of new control technologies. NESCAUM’s report underlines the need for EPA to take action this fall to dramatically reduce mercury emissions from power plants - the leading source of unregulated mercury emissions in the U.S.

The federal Clean Air Act required EPA to decide by late 1994 whether to call for more protective mercury controls at power plants. Three years ago, EPA issued a report identifying mercury as the hazardous pollutant of greatest potential concern. However, as a result of a series of delays, the agency is now under federal court order to make a decision by December 15. Studies have shown that these coal-burning utilities are responsible for about one-third of the total emissions of mercury from human activities in the United States.

“Mercury pollution presents a serious long-term toxic threat to humans and to wildlife,” stated Carmine DiBattista, Bureau Chief of the Air Management Bureau at the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. “This new study makes it clear that we can reduce the quantity of mercury that coal-fired power plants, the largest single source, discharge into our air each year – and that capacity will grow in the next two to five years.”

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The NESCAUM report examines three closely related instances in which the federal government implemented new, tougher regulations to attack a high-profile air pollution problem. In each case, the new pollution-control requirements sparked the rapid development and installation of new control technologies, resulting in sharp emissions and cost declines after the regulation had been put in place. The three case studies include: (1) examination of the development of emissions controls in automobiles; (2) utility control technologies to reduce nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) – a key ingredient in the formation of smog; and (3) utility control equipment that removes sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) – the main contributor to acid rain. The report also analyzes the status and cost-effectiveness of several different mercury-control technologies.

“The publication of NESCAUM’s prior 1998 Mercury Study jump-started the region’s effort to take actions that already have significantly reduced mercury discharges,” said Christopher Recchia, Deputy Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and former co-chair of the New England Governors/Eastern Canadian Premiers Mercury Task Force. “A lot more needs to be done at the national level if we are to succeed in protecting our health and the environment. EPA must be willing, and allowed, to step up to the plate and control these sources. This latest NESCAUM report gives EPA even more support for immediate action,” Recchia said.

“With the publication of Massachusetts’ mercury study a few years ago, we have been playing a leadership role in studying the mercury problem and taking action – this summer we issued a proposal to regulate mercury from utility boilers,” said Nancy L. Seidman, Deputy Director of Planning and Evaluation in the Bureau of Waste Prevention, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. “Although the states can and will continue to provide leadership, a lot more could be accomplished to protect public health if EPA stepped up to the plate,” Seidman added.

“The bottom line,” contended Kenneth A. Colburn, Director of the Air Resources Division of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, “is that this report develops a solid case for federal action to cut mercury emissions from these facilities. New Hampshire had a similar situation in the mid-1990s regarding utility emissions of nitrogen oxides – the primary cause of ozone smog. One of our electric companies initially argued that no technology was commercially available to cost-effectively reduce these emissions from one of its dirtiest plants. But after a long negotiation, new technology was installed that proved more cost-effective, more environmentally effective, and more reliable than we ever imagined. We expect that technology to reduce mercury emissions will exhibit a similar pattern.”

Jason Grumet, Executive Director of NESCAUM stated, “It’s ironic that we must produce a study to demonstrate that we don’t need more studies. We need regulatory action. The impetus for technological progress to reduce mercury emissions now rests squarely with EPA. Regulatory action, not research and development, is the catalyst for technology improvements and subsequent environmental and public health benefits.”

“Controlling mercury is one of our major challenges, particularly given its persistence in the environment,” stated Robert K. Warland, Director, Division of Air Resources, New York

Department of Environmental Conservation. “With more than 40 states issuing mercury warnings for their lakes and rivers – and New York having issued more than any other in the Northeast – our path could not be clearer. We call on EPA to announce this fall that new, tighter controls on power plants must be installed,” added Warland.

“Although Rhode Island doesn’t have any coal-fired power plants or other large sources of mercury, we still have one of the highest mercury deposition rates in the country,” noted Office of Air Resources Chief, Stephen Majkut, of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. “The reason for this is long-range transport of airborne mercury emitted by upwind power plants, especially coal plants hundreds of miles away. A clear directive from EPA to control that mercury could make all the difference in the world. And for Rhode Island’s large network of waterways and estuaries, that would be very good news.”

“Mercury affects ecosystems and can harm wildlife, as we know from studies of our native loons,” noted James P. Brooks, Director, Bureau of Air Quality of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. “And we now know that a major source of that mercury can be retrofitted at reasonable cost, while driving further technological development that will cut costs even more. We saw the same thing happen regarding auto emissions, acid rain and ozone controls. Positive action by EPA would build on that knowledge.”

“Based on our experience as the first state to require mercury controls on Municipal Waste Combustors, which was later copied by US EPA, I can tell you that the time is ripe for a national program to control these toxic emissions from utilities, commented New Jersey’s Department of Environmental Protection Administrator for Air Quality Management, John C. Elston. “In 1965, some asserted that automobile pollution controls couldn’t be installed without triggering economic catastrophe.” Elston continued, “However, cars are now dramatically cleaner, and by 2005, they will be cleaner still – between 95% and 98% over the ’65 models. How did that come about? Through technology-driving regulation.”

The report was prepared by NESCAUM staff and a panel of outside experts, including Dr. Alex Farrell, a member of the research faculty in the College of Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, and Dr. James M. Lents, former Executive Officer of the South Coast Air Quality Management District in the Los Angeles area and now Director of the Environmental Policy and Corporate Affiliates Program at the University of California-Riverside. NESCAUM is a non-profit organization forwarding regional and national air quality issues. NESCAUM’s Board is comprised of the Air Directors of the Northeast states, including New England, New York and New Jersey.

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*To obtain a copy of this report, order publication number SS-25, “Environmental Regulation and Technology Innovation: Controlling Mercury Emissions from Coal-Fired Boilers,” using NESCAUM’s Publications List found at <http://www.nescaum.org/pdf/publist.pdf>.*