

United States Congress

June 24, 2004

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to encourage you to take strong affirmative action to reduce domestic mercury pollution and constructively engage in an international dialogue to produce a binding global agreement to reduce, and eliminate where feasible, emissions of mercury and other toxic air pollutants. As a first step, we urge you to submit a thoughtful and timely response to the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) February 23, 2004 request for information on current U.S. actions to address mercury pollution and recommendations for potential future action. The UNEP Governing Council will collect and analyze this information and other nations' responses in preparation for its next meeting in February 2005, where the Council will "consider further measures to deal with the significant global adverse impacts of mercury." The deadline for the response is July 1, 2004.

Specifically, UNEP invited the United States and other nations to:

- report on any progress made in the implementation of decision 22/4 V (described below), especially with regards to any goals or national actions taken since the last Governing Council session;
- provide any views with regard to the need for further measures for addressing the significant global adverse impacts of mercury and its compounds; and
- provide any views on what further action might be taken with regard to other heavy metals, for example, lead and cadmium.

After considering the findings of the December 2002 Global Mercury Assessment report, the UNEP Governing Council authored decision 22/4 V, stating: "national, regional and global actions, both immediate and long-term, should be initiated as soon as possible to protect human health and the environment through measures that will reduce or eliminate releases of mercury and its compounds into the environment." The Council decision also urged all countries to take actions to identify exposed populations and ecosystems, as well as mobilize financial and technical resources to support national, regional, and global efforts and capacity building. We support these Council objectives. We seek your commitment to these goals, and urge that they be reflected in the U.S. response to UNEP by the July 1 deadline.

Mercury is a toxic heavy metal that has a long-lasting presence in our environment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Mercury Study Report to Congress estimates that around sixty percent of the mercury deposition occurring in the United States is due to current domestic

anthropogenic sources. The rest of our deposition comes from foreign anthropogenic sources, domestic re-emission, or natural sources. Emissions from foreign sources combine with U.S. emissions in a global atmospheric pool of mercury which travels long distances and is deposited around the world.

Once deposited in water and sediment, mercury can be absorbed by fish or re-released to the atmosphere, making mercury pollution a persistent problem that continues spreading. Once in fish, mercury bioaccumulates in the aquatic food chain, leaving those who eat certain fish exposed to dangerous levels of this toxin. The National Academy of Sciences has confirmed scientific research demonstrating that maternal consumption of unsafe levels of mercury in fish can cause serious neurodevelopmental harm in fetuses, including IQ deficits, learning and attention delays, poor motor function, mental retardation, seizure disorders, and cerebral palsy. According to EPA, one in six women of childbearing age in the U.S. has blood levels of mercury in excess of the agency's safe health threshold. This means that over six hundred thousand newborns face serious health risks due to mercury pollution every year.

The EPA Mercury Report to Congress states that the United States contributes more to the global atmospheric pool of mercury than it receives. We believe that good global citizenship requires us to reduce and eliminate, wherever feasible, our domestic mercury and toxic air emissions from all sources and to cooperate with other countries to reduce this global health threat as soon as possible.

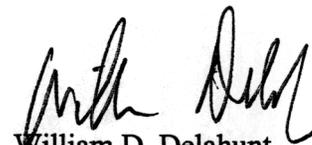
Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


James M. Jeffords
U.S. Senator


Patrick J. Leahy
U.S. Senator


Barbara Lee
U.S. Representative


William D. Delahunt
U.S. Representative


Frank R. Lautenberg
U.S. Senator


Mark Dayton
U.S. Senator

Thomas H. Allen
U.S. Representative

Henry A. Waxman
U.S. Representative

Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator

Edward M. Kennedy
U.S. Senator

Charles E. Schumer
U.S. Senator

Jon S. Corzine
U.S. Senator

Edward J. Markey
U.S. Representative

Janice D. Schakowsky
U.S. Representative

Thomas R. Carper
U.S. Senator

Jack Reed
U.S. Senator

Hilda L. Solis
U.S. Representative

Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator

Paul S. Sarbanes
U.S. Senator

Joseph I. Lieberman
U.S. Senator

Olympia J. Snowe
U.S. Senator