

**Maine Council of Churches
Environmental Justice Program
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March 1, 2004

Congressman Tom Allen
United States House of Representatives
Public Hearing on Mercury Emissions Ruling
Augusta, Maine

Dear Congressman Allen:

The Maine Council of Churches' Environmental Justice Program asks you, as our representative to the U.S. Congress, to carry a message to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Secretary of Energy. With deep concern for the sustainability of the living web of creation we oppose the proposed rule change on mercury pollution as well as the recently announced plan to build 94 new coal-burning power plants across the nation. Both proposals are appalling in light of our growing scientific knowledge that human activity — primarily burning fossil fuels in power plants and vehicles — is seriously compromising the health of our environment and all of the earth's inhabitants for generations to come. We have the technology available today to reduce mercury pollution by 90%; yet our federal government proposes to introduce a "cap-and-trade" program for this toxic pollutant and to build more power plants that will generate mercury emissions.

Living close to the land, most Mainers have experienced firsthand the effects of mercury and air pollution emitted by coal-burning power plants to our south and west. At our rivers and lakes we read the posted fish advisories. We see inhalers in backpacks reminding us that our children suffer from the highest asthma rate in the region. We've learned on hot summer days that the heavy haze that hugs our coastline is ground ozone and is dangerous for our friends and neighbors who have respiratory problems. Stay inside and reduce your level of activity, we are warned.

Concerned about these growing problems in our environment, congregations and their members across Maine have been working together to do something. Together we are conserving energy as we obey the first Commandment and put into practice our covenant with the Creator "to care for the garden." With support from the state Public Utilities Commission's Efficiency Maine, congregations are participating in free energy audits and rebates to install energy-efficient appliances; individuals are replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs at rebated prices and implementing other technologies that conserve energy in their homes.

We want to learn and participate in state programs that collect items containing hazardous wastes like mercury.

And it is not only the faith community. Businesses and the state have also made commitments, purchasing Maine-produced “green” electricity and supporting wind and solar power development through green tag purchases — all as a result of Maine Interfaith Power & Light’s successful campaign to bring renewable electricity options to Maine residents.

One by one, community by community, Mainers are making a difference in the amount and kind of energy consumed in the state and cleaning up our own contributions to air and water degradation. But we can’t do it alone. We need those who create policy and oversee the protection of our environment and its resources — the EPA, especially — to stand with us and enforce the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, which are vital to the future of all of our neighbors on the earth. These leaders must indeed work with us, not against us, and champion life-sustaining energy and toxic pollution-reduction policies.

Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of the earth and its living inhabitants.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne D. Burt".

Anne D. (Andy) Burt
Director
Environmental Justice Program