

March 1, 2004

Administrator Mike Leavitt
United States Environmental Protection Agency
EPA Docket Center (Air Docket)
U.S. EPA West (6102T)
Room B-108
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Re: Proposed National Emission Standards for Hazardous Pollutants; and, in the Alternative, Proposed Standards of Performance for New and Existing Stationary Sources: Electric Utility Steam Generating Units; Docket ID No.OAR-2002-0056, 69 Fed. Reg. 4652 (January 30, 2004).

Dear Administrator Leavitt:

As chefs from Portland, ME, we are deeply invested in the safety of the seafood we prepare and serve to our patrons. Today, we write to respectfully express our concerns over the proposed rule by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to control mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants.

Every year, people from all over Maine and the country enjoy the fine seafood offerings of Portland; we pride ourselves on the wide selection of fresh seafood dishes that our many visitors enjoy year after year.

Whether preparing a salmon filet or seared tuna, chefs know that fresh seafood is a critical component of our cuisine, which is why keeping it safe is so important. Unfortunately, the levels of mercury in some species of fish such as swordfish, oysters, tuna, halibut, red fish, pike, sea bass and others make them unsafe for young women and children. Mercury pollution poses a real threat to public health.

Right now, power plants across the country are contributing to a looming mercury crisis, contaminating much of the seafood that Portland is so famous for. Electric power plants are responsible for approximately 30 percent of the country's mercury emissions and are the only major mercury polluters that remain uncontrolled. Smokestacks spew mercury pollution into the air, where it rains and snows down into our waterways and accumulates up the food chain.

The principal way that people are exposed to mercury is by eating fish, a staple of our restaurants. Maine and 43 other states, the EPA and the Food and Drug Administration have issued various advisories warning people, especially women and children, to avoid or limit eating some types of fish. Even with such warnings in place, the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 1 out of 6 U.S. women of child-bearing age have unsafe levels of mercury in their blood.

In the interest of our customers, our health and our environment, we are joining together to ask for action to keep the mercury levels from increasing. To make sure that mercury contamination does not affect the popularity of the restaurant industry in Portland, we write to request stronger regulations on power plant emissions of mercury.

Officials can, and should, take immediate action to nearly eliminate the mercury pollution that's spewing into our air from power plants. Two years ago, EPA's own scientists said current technologies could achieve a 90 percent reduction from power plants. The Bush administration should remove as much mercury from power plants as is technologically feasible- 90 percent.

We respectfully urge the EPA to adopt a rule that maximizes the protection of human health and our fisheries by regulating mercury emissions to the level that we know is technologically feasible and to do so quickly.

Sincerely,

Becky Lee Simmons
Chef, Owner
Katahdin Restaurant