

## **Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

### **“An Oversight Hearing on the Administration’s Mercury Pollution Rule”**

**George Meyer**  
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Good Afternoon, my name is George Meyer and I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. The Federation is the state’s largest conservation organization, representing 100 hunting, fishing and trapping groups with approximately 75,000 members.

By way of personal background, I served for thirty-two years with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and eight years as Secretary of that Department under the administration of former Governor and U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson. On a national level I served as the President of the Environmental Council of the States and as the Vice-President of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation is greatly concerned about the weak mercury emission reduction rules that have been adopted by the U.S. EPA. Our members are heavily engaged in recreational fishing and our members and their families regularly consume the 49 million fish that they catch in the state. Two million people fish in the State of Wisconsin, which is 40 percent of our population

All of Wisconsin’s 15,000 lakes and 44,000 miles of streams have been posted with mercury health advisories directing that women of child bearing age and children under the age of 15 are advised not to eat large sport fish such as walleye, northern pike and bass more than once a month and panfish such as bluegill and crappie more than once a week. Men are warned not eat walleye and northern pike more than once a week.

This is a serious health issue. A recent study completed by the Wisconsin Division of Health showed that one out of five hair samples of Wisconsin residents revealed levels of mercury contamination in excess of EPA’s standard of 1 part per million. This is a real issue. Every day Wisconsin anglers and their families live with the decision of whether they can eat the fish that they catch.

The tourism associated with recreational fishing is a major part of Wisconsin’s economy adding \$2 billion dollars in revenue and supporting 30,000 jobs.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Federation was one of many conservation, health, tourism and environmental organizations that petitioned the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to adopt utility mercury emission reduction regulations. These rules, the third of their kind in the country and the first in the Midwest, went into effect last year. The Wisconsin regulations require mercury reductions of 40 percent by 2010, 75 percent by 2015 with the goal of 80 percent reduction by 2018.

In contrast, the U.S. EPA rules only require a reduction of 21 percent in 2010 and a 69 percent reduction in 2018. From a practical standpoint, under the EPA regulations, few utilities in the country will have to make any reductions before 2018 and in fact it is projected that mercury emissions will actually increase in 19 states before 2010, including several that will directly impact the amount of mercury falling in Wisconsin waters.

What is extremely frustrating is that we know that currently available technology can reduce mercury emissions from eighty to over ninety percent. Within the last year, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources issued Clean Air Act permits for two new coal-fired power plants that require over 80 percent mercury reduction. The two utilities involved, WE Energies and Wisconsin Public Service Corporation, readily agreed to these requirements. Not only are these requirements technically feasible now, they are economically feasible. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' economic study of the costs of the rules that they adopted last year established that the cost per household for the Wisconsin rules was \$18 per household per year.

It should be noted that mercury reduction in Wisconsin is not a partisan issue. The Wisconsin rules were supported by three Wisconsin Administrations, two Republican and one Democratic and the final rules were reviewed in concurred in by a Republican Legislature.

This should not be a partisan political issue. This is an issue of protecting the health of our families. This is about the continuation of our heritage of fishing with our families. I think that it was said best by one of our members when testifying in support of Wisconsin mercury emission reduction standards: "You know when we adopted a Constitutional Right to Hunt, Fish and Trap here in Wisconsin, I thought that it included the right to eat the fish."

Thank you very much for listening to the concerns of the sportsmen and women of this country.