

A.C.S.L. Conservation Report

By Jack Walters, Conservation Chair, A.C.S.L.

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DEP REGIONAL MERCURY COLLECTION EFFORTS RECLAIMED 1,451 POUNDS OF MERCURY IN 2005

Removal of Neurotoxin Protects Public Health

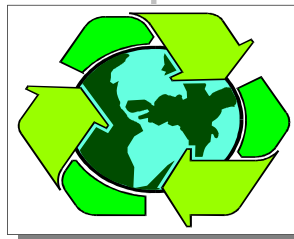
The Department of Environmental Protection today announced that its six regional offices collected 1,451 pounds of mercury in 2005 through a variety of collection strategies aimed at reducing the dangers posed by the neurotoxin to people and wildlife.

“This is important because our children are at risk,” DEP Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty said. “Babies born each year can suffer learning disabilities and impaired motor function, memory and vision problems due to the high levels of mercury in their bloodstream.

“The Rendell administration is combating mercury exposure in Pennsylvania through efforts that range from pushing for more stringent federal controls on mercury emissions from power plants to holding door-to-door collection events for elemental mercury.”

Since 1997, DEP’s six regional offices have collected almost 17,000 pounds of elemental mercury from schools and homes. Liquid elemental mercury is most commonly found in homes in

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God Bless America



NEW FEDERAL ARSENIC STANDARDS EFFECTIVE TODAY

Information Outreach to Drinking Water Suppliers and Support Efforts Continue

New federal drinking water standards designed to lower the levels of arsenic in drinking water take effect today for Pennsylvania’s public water systems, Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty said.

The federal law lowers the maximum contaminant level (MCL) for arsenic from 0.050 milligrams per liter (mg/L), or 50 parts per billion, to 0.010 mg/L, or 10 parts per billion.

DEP incorporates by reference federal MCLs as state MCLs, making them applicable here.

“The reduced arsenic levels further protect the safety of public drinking water and should strengthen public confidence in the systems that supply our drinking water,” McGinty said.

“These regulatory changes have been years in the making, and DEP has been working aggressively to make sure drinking water suppliers understand the federal requirements and have in place the mechanisms they need to meet the new standard.”

DEP’s outreach efforts have been ongoing for years as the new standards were being developed and finalized, and every effort was made to support drinking water systems that needed to install new treatment.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency adopted the new standard for arsenic in drinking water Jan. 22,

2001. The rule became effective Feb. 22, 2002, and compliance becomes mandatory today, Jan. 23, 2006.

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thermometers, thermostats and barometers. At schools, elemental mercury may be found in containers in laboratories and thermometers and blood-pressure gauges in nurses' offices.

Mercury is not dangerous when sealed inside these devices and containers; however, exposure can result if the devices and containers are broken or improperly disposed of. By reducing the amount of elemental mercury in the public's hands, the chances of human exposure to mercury vapors, or of spills to the environment, are lowered. Additionally, DEP collections ensure that the mercury is recycled by a reputable company, rather than disposed of in a municipal waste landfill.

Mercury can be particularly harmful when products containing mercury are spilled, discarded in drains or incinerated as waste.

Once mercury is released into the air it will fall back to the ground in rain and snow, contaminating soils and water bodies. Bacteria in aquatic ecosystems can convert mercury to organic methylmercury --- a potent neurotoxin --- that builds up in organisms and becomes more concentrated as it travels up the food chain, where it can accumulate in the tissues of fish and shellfish. Consumption of contaminated fish is a significant health concern leading to fish consumption advisories in most states, including Pennsylvania.

Beyond its dangers to public health, the accumulation of methylmercury in fish also threatens Pennsylvania's economy. Some 2 million people fish in Pennsylvania each year, including about 500,000 youths under age 16, and more than 18 million fishing trips annually take place in the commonwealth. All that activity generates \$1.6 billion for the state's economy, supports 15,000 jobs and brings in more than \$50 million in state sales and income taxes.

Other Pennsylvania strategies to reduce mercury exposure include developing state-specific regulations to control mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants in Pennsylvania, formally challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's final

MERCURY COLLECTION EFFORTS RECLAIMED 1,451 POUNDS OF MERCURY IN 2005 (continued)

mercury emissions reduction rule for new and existing coal-fired power plants, forming a partnership with Pennsylvania dentists to review voluntary best-management practices for mercury-bearing amalgam wastes and collect obsolete supplies of elemental mercury, and creating the Pennsylvania Mercury Automobile Switch Removal Program, which encourages the recycling of mercury from scrap automobiles.

For more information, visit DEP's Web site at www.depweb.state.pa.us, Keyword: "Mercury."

**NEW FEDERAL ARSENIC STANDARDS
EFFECTIVE TODAY
(continued)**

DEP has worked with community water suppliers and non-transient, non-community public water suppliers -- those that serve water to at least 25 of the same people for more than six months in a year, but not year round -- to help bring their operations into compliance ahead of the effective date.

The department sent letters to all public water system operators in July 2005 informing them of the change, and the systems were alerted again through a DEP media campaign in October. DEP officials have been in direct contact with systems identified as having arsenic levels above 0.010 mg/L in past monitoring. According to historical information, about 90 of a total of 3,340 systems (or about 3 percent) have arsenic levels above 0.010 mg/L.

Efforts also were made to encourage these systems to apply for various grants and other programs available to offset the costs of installing treatment, such as DEP's Growing Greener grants for innovative technologies and the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Development Authority's funding, and about EPA's Arsenic Treatment Technology Research Demonstrations and Environmental Technology Verification Program. Initial compliance monitoring for arsenic will begin immediately for the new MCL.

State regulations require water systems in violation of the MCL to issue public notification and conduct more frequent monitoring as interim measures until treatment is provided to reduce the arsenic levels or a new source is brought on line.

Some studies have linked long-term exposure to high levels of arsenic in drinking water to cancer of the bladder and lungs. Short-term exposure to high doses of arsenic can cause other adverse health effects, but such effects are unlikely to occur from Pennsylvania's public water supplies that are in compliance with the existing arsenic

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**NEW FEDERAL ARSENIC STANDARDS EF-
FECTIVE TODAY
(continued)**

standard of 0.050 mg/L.

EPA set the former standard of 0.050 mg/L in 1975, based on a Public Health Service standard originally established in 1942. A March 1999 report by the National Academy of Sciences concluded standards should be strengthened to better protect public health.

Arsenic occurs naturally in rocks and soil, water, air, plants and animals. It can be released into the environment through natural activities such as volcanic action, erosion of rocks and forest fires, or through human activities.

For more information on the new rule, visit DEP's Web site at www.depweb.state.pa.us, Keyword: "Drinking Water."

**DEP ANNOUNCES PUBLIC MEETINGS,
HEARINGS ON
I-99 REMEDIATION PERMITS**

Sessions Will Be Held in Indiana, Centre County

The Department of Environmental Protection will hold two public meetings and hearings next month so residents can ask questions and present testimony regarding permit applications submitted by Robindale Energy Services and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to correct the Interstate 99 acid rock drainage problem in the Skytop area of Centre County.

The Robindale meeting and hearing will be March 7 at the Pine Township Volunteer Fire Co. social hall in Heilwood, Indiana County. It will address a proposal to transport crushed pyritic rock from PennDOT's I-99 construction site to a disposal facility that would be constructed at Robindale's existing Lancashire No. 24 mine.

The PennDOT meeting and hearing will be March 9 at the Park Forest Middle School auditorium in Patton Township, Centre County. It will address some on-site remediation actions PennDOT plans to take to solve problems that will remain after the pyritic rock is excavated and removed.

At both locations, the public meetings will start at 6:30 p.m. with the hearing to follow immediately at 8:30 p.m.

The public meeting in Indiana County will include presentations by Robindale Energy Services, PennDOT and DEP. The Centre County public meeting will have PennDOT and DEP making presentations.

"At both meetings, the presentations will be followed by a question-and-answer session so residents can better understand the two proposals," DEP Northcentral Regional Director Robert Yowell said. "We are very interested in receiving comments from residents in both Indiana County and Centre County. Public input is an integral part of the decision-making process."

During the public hearings, residents will be able to present oral testimony for a maximum of five or 10 minutes, depending on the number of people

**DEP ANNOUNCES PUBLIC MEETINGS,
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(continued)**

who register to testify that night. Written testimony of any length also will be accepted and given equal consideration.

Testimony will be recorded by a court reporter and transcribed into a written document. DEP will respond in writing to all relevant comments at the time it makes a final decision on the permit applications.

All of the permit applications are available for public review at the following locations:

- Willowbank County Office Building, 420 Holmes St., Bellefonte.
- Patton Township Building, 100 Patton Plaza, State College.
- Port Matilda Borough Building, 400 S. High St., Port Matilda.
- DEP's Moshannon District Mining Office, 186 Enterprise Dr., Philipsburg.
- Indiana County Conservation District Office, USDA Service Center, 1432 Route 286 Highway East, Indiana.
- Indiana County Courthouse, 825 Philadelphia St., Indiana.
- Pine Township Municipal Building, 6410 Route 403 Highway North, Heilwood.
- DEP's Cambria District Mining Office, 296 Industrial Park Road, Ebensburg.
- DEP's Southwest Regional Office, 400 Waterfront Dr., Pittsburgh.

In addition, the applications can be reviewed at DEP's Northcentral Regional Office, 208 W. Third St., Suite 101, Williamsport, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. An appointment must be made by calling Kathy Arndt at 570-327-3693.

For more information on the I-99 acid rock drainage problem, visit DEP's Web site at www.depweb.state.pa.us. Click on "DEP Keywords" and then "I-99 Information."