National Health Organizations Tap SELC to Help Them Reduce Mercury Pollution

Thousands of doctors across the nation are suing EPA for malpractice.

Representing over 250,000 health care professionals nationwide, four prominent organizations—Physicians for Social Responsibility, American Public Health Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and American Nurses Association—have banded together for the first time to challenge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in federal court. The target: EPA’s so-called “Clean Air Mercury Rule,” a program that provides inadequate controls over mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants. These groups have taken this unprecedented step for two reasons: first, mercury presents a serious and pervasive threat to people’s health—especially our children’s health. Second, EPA’s rule will allow coal-fired facilities to continue to emit high levels of mercury far into the future, and creates the very real threat of “hotspots”—local areas of high mercury concentrations. Alarmingly, EPA adopted this rule contrary to advice from its own internal committee on children’s health.

When the groups collectively

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin that affects the brains of children and fetuses.

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SELC senior attorney John Suttles

decided to take action, they knew they needed lawyers who had the capacity and expertise to successfully tackle a big, important issue like this. Our conservation and public health allies immediately pointed them to the Southern Environmental Law Center.

John Suttles, lead attorney on the case, describes the working relationship between SELC and the health organizations as highly complementary and effective. “SELC brings the legal firepower to expose the fatal flaws in EPA’s program. The health care organizations bring weight to the case as well-established, highly regarded national experts that have a long-standing and proven interest in the health of American citizens.”

As the mercury challenge continues, another critical issue emerged that caught the attention of the four public health groups. Again ignoring the advice of its own science advisory committees, EPA proposed a new standard for fine particulate matter, or “soot,” that falls short of protecting health. A byproduct of power plant and vehicle emissions, particle pollution consists of acids, chemicals, metals, and dust that penetrate deeply into the lungs and can also enter the bloodstream, posing serious cardiovascular threats. Based on the positive, synergistic collaboration we developed in the mercury rule challenge, the national organizations have asked SELC to work with them on improving the fine particle matter standards.