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## **New Mercury Inventory for New Mexico Shows Coal-Fired Power Plants, Mining, Greatest Contributors to Mercury Pollution**

(Santa Fe, N.M.) The New Mexico Environment Department completed an inventory of mercury emissions in New Mexico that indicates power plants and mining are the largest sources of mercury pollution in New Mexico.

The inventory estimates 5,854 pounds of mercury from all sources was released into New Mexico's air, land and water.

"Mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants causes grave consequences for babies and children, including developmental problems, cerebral palsy and learning disabilities," said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. "The inventory is yet another indicator of why the Desert Rock coal-fired power plant is a bad idea for our state – we simply can not handle more of this pollution."

The inventory will help the department determine what initiatives will be most effective in reducing those emissions to protect the health of New Mexicans and the environment.

Coal-fired power plants account for approximately 55 percent of the total mercury released in New Mexico and mining operations resulted in 17 percent of that total. Other sources of mercury emissions that contributed to 8 percent of the total include petroleum refineries, landfills, government research facilities, cement and brick manufacturing plants, crematoria, dental health services and products, human excretion and the disposal of mercury-containing consumer products, such as thermometers and thermostats. Wild and prescribed-burn fires also contributed to mercury pollution.

Mercury emitted when coal is burned is a dangerous neurotoxin proven to cause a variety of developmental neurological abnormalities in babies and young children, including delayed developmental milestones, cerebral palsy, reduced neurological test scores and delays and deficits in learning abilities.

Mercury is a neurotoxin and can damage the brain, kidneys, and lungs. Unborn and young children are the most susceptible to the toxic effects of mercury. Pregnant and nursing mothers can pass mercury to the

developing fetus or infant. Mercury released into the atmosphere is eventually deposited into surface waters or onto land where it may be washed into surface waters. Mercury can also be released directly into surface water and on soil. Biological processes in water and soil convert elemental and inorganic mercury into methylmercury, which is taken up by small organisms at the bottom of the food chain. Methylmercury is then concentrated in the bodies of fish and shellfish. Eating mercury-containing fish is one of the two main sources of nonoccupational mercury exposure to humans. Dental amalgam, which consists of approximately 50% mercury, is the other main source. The Environment Department, the state Department of Health and the state Game and Fish Department have published “Fish Consumption Guidelines Due to Mercury Contamination” to help citizens make informed decisions about what fish they eat ( <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/SWQB/advisories/GuidelinesFebruary2001-Mercury.pdf> )

The Environment Department plans to add another mercury monitor to its monitoring network at Navajo Lake to determine mercury concentrations in northwest New Mexico, near Public Service Co. of New Mexico’s Four Corners Power Plant and San Juan Generating Station. The Environment Department has other initiatives to reduce mercury pollution, including having a pilot program to collect and recycle fluorescent bulbs that contain mercury and participating in a national program to collect and recycle used auto switches containing mercury.

The New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board adopted new mercury regulations proposed by the New Mexico Environment Department in April 2007. Those regulations allow the state to continue to protect its residents from harmful mercury pollution and forgo a less protective federal cap and trade program for mercury emissions (<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/Oots/PR/PR-MercRegsAdopt-3-9-07.pdf>).

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