

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

Public Hearing on Mercury Emission Reduction

May 2, 2006

9:00 a.m.

Room 8 E-B East Wing

Testimony of

Jack W. Snyder, M.D.

Member, Board of Directors, Annapolis Center for Science-Based Public Policy

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Annapolis Center for Science-Based Public Policy, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important forum.

I am a physician, a certified medical toxicologist, and a public health information specialist, and I am licensed to practice medicine in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For fifteen years, I served on the full-time faculty of the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. In the course of my thirty-year professional career, I have testified more than 200 times in local, state, and federal legislative, regulatory, and judicial proceedings. In many of these forums, I have addressed issues related to health of the public as well as health of the environment.

At the Annapolis Center, we promote the use of sound science in decision-making. Consequently, from our perspective, one of the important issues in this forum is whether attempts to reduce man-made mercury emissions, in Pennsylvania or elsewhere, will measurably improve, or otherwise decrease risks to, the health of the public. Our assessment of the "state-of-the science" leads us to conclude that it will not.

We would like to ask this committee to keep the following points in mind as you strive to balance public health concerns with social, economic, and political considerations. As of May 2, 2006:

- a) You have not been provided credible (valid, reliable, and generally accepted) evidence supporting speculation that burdens of mercury have increased in the past decade, century, or even millennium in fish, in humans, or in the total environment of the Commonwealth, of the United States, or even of the world.

- b) You have not been provided credible evidence supporting speculation that U.S. power plants account for any increase in, or for any more than one percent of, global mercury emissions.
- c) You have not been provided credible evidence supporting speculation that mercury emitted from U.S. power plants will accumulate in so-called “hot spots of pollution,” or that cutting emissions will reduce mercury in fish.
- d) You have not been provided credible evidence supporting speculation that any women, children, or fetuses have been harmed, or have been placed at increased risk of harm, as a result of eating fish obtained from bodies of water in Pennsylvania or other parts of the United States.
- e) You have not been provided credible evidence supporting speculation that “mercury is a growing threat” or that “mercury is lead’s evil twin” for purposes of regulating potential threats to human and environmental health.

By contrast, the Annapolis Center recommends that the committee give considerable weight to documents and studies that indicate the following:

- a) Mercury emissions and depositions in the U.S. have been decreasing for many years in the absence of attempts to reduce emissions from power plants.
- b) The recent increase in the number of fish advisories is due to an increase in the number of mercury measurements in fish, and not due to an increase in levels of mercury in fish or in the environment.
- c) Increased fish consumption by pregnant women and young children has been associated with “improved intelligence” and “higher mental development” scores in children, while increased fish consumption by adults has been associated with “slower cognitive decline.”
- d) Finding a measurable amount of mercury in blood or urine does not mean that the level of mercury causes an adverse health effect. Importantly, the blood mercury levels in U.S. women of child-bearing age have been shown consistently to fall orders of magnitude below levels considered associated with known health effects.

In conclusion, as a promoter of the use of sound science in decision-making, the Annapolis Center believes it is time to stop the “science charading” used in support of environmental regulation. When speculation, modeling, and novel assumptions are interspersed with, or used as substitutes for, verifiable and reproducible measurements in the course of issuing regulations, our lawmakers and citizens deserve now, more than ever, to have the details of that “science behind lawmaking” subjected to intense scrutiny by all interested parties.