

## **Proposed Changes to ORSANCO's Pollution Control Standards Could Allow More Mercury Pollution in the Ohio River**

Kentucky Waterways Alliance and allies concerned river is at a tipping point for mercury

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Louisville, KY – Proposed changes to current pollution control standards for the Ohio River could equal greater amounts of mercury entering a river that already receives more toxic pollution than any other in the nation. The Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO), a multi-state compact that recommends standards for the river's water quality, has initiated an Accelerated Review of Pollution Control Standards to address emerging issues for the river. One of the proposed changes would give polluters the right to dump increasing amounts of mercury and other toxins into the river using methods that are being phased out in the Great Lakes and across the country due to health concerns.

Specifically, polluters would be allowed to apply for a waiver of the October 2013 moratorium on mixing zones for Bio-accumulative Chemicals of Concern (BCCs). A mixing zone is an area where toxic pollution is allowed to be dumped in quantities greater than health standards and diluted to meet the legal limits for water quality. BCCs, like mercury, are toxins that build up in big fish as they eat many smaller fish. Most mercury pollution in Kentucky comes from coal fired power plants.

People are exposed to mercury through air emissions and by eating fish and seafood containing mercury from polluted waters. Over time, this exposure causes mercury to build up in the body causing damage and poisoning. Mercury affects the human brain, spinal cord, kidneys, liver, immune system, and pituitary gland and is associated with elevated risks for autism, mental impairment, and Alzheimer's disease. At greatest risk are pregnant women, women of childbearing age, and children who eat fish. Exposure to mercury causes brain and nervous system damage in unborn babies, infants, and children - impairing cognitive thinking, memory, attention, language, motor and visual skill development. A recent UCLA analysis of Center for Disease Control data found inorganic mercury in the blood samples of 30% of childbearing age women. Tests conducted by ORSANCO reveal over 800 miles of the Ohio River is currently polluted for mercury and a recent survey claimed over 13 million pounds of Ohio River fish are consumed every year by the public.

“ORSANCO's own data shows the Ohio is at a tipping point for mercury. At the same time, millions of people are using the river for recreation and eating fish from the river every year,” said Jason Flickner, Kentucky Waterways Alliance water resources program director. “Why don't Ohio Valley residents deserve the same protections from a destructive toxic chemical as the rest of the country? The Ohio

should not be allowed to be degraded at the expense of our children's health and future generations. ORSANCO should seriously rethink the message this proposed change sends to the public and make the decision to protect public health."

The proposed revision to the variance for mixing zone requirements has been pushed by the coal power industry. Clean Air Act requirements have forced coal power plants to install scrubbers in smokestacks to remove sulfur dioxide. These scrubbers also remove many of the other toxins from burning coal, including mercury; and are washed off to maintain efficient operation. The toxic scrubber wash water is collected and stored in onsite impoundments and mixed with wastewater from the plant before being dumped in the Ohio River. The coal power industry claims that economically feasible technology to treat the scrubber wash water for mercury is not available, and the variance revision is necessary to comply with ORSANCO's Pollution Control Standards.

The Commission has scheduled a series of four public education workshops and a public hearing:

Tuesday, July 20 from 4 to 7 pm at the Aztar Conference Center (Maple B Room), Evansville, IN

Wednesday, July 21 from 4 to 7 pm at the Galt House (Jones Room), Louisville, KY

Thursday, July 22 from 4 to 7 pm at the Marshall University Corbly Hall Room 104, Huntington, WV

Tuesday, July 27 from 4 to 7 pm at the Holiday Inn Meadow Lands, Washington, PA

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

Tuesday, August 3 from 4 to 7 pm at the Holiday Inn Airport (Hamilton Room), 1717 Airport Exchange Blvd., Erlanger, KY

KWA believes the variance revision could possibly also allow variances to the 2013 moratorium on mixing zones for BCCs to be renewed indefinitely, allow new mixing zones for BCCs, and allow increases in the amount of BCCs discharged in existing mixing zones – all currently restricted in ORSANCO's existing Standards. To address this concern, a new campaign has been launched "STOP Mercury Rising in the Ohio" to convince ORSANCO's Commissioners to protect public health by voting no to the proposed revisions of the rules that could allow the dumping of more mercury into the Ohio River.

Additional information and a comment submission form to ORSANCO are available at [www.KWAlliance.org/mercury](http://www.KWAlliance.org/mercury). ORSANCO is accepting comments until September 3 and will vote on the revisions of the new standards at the October 14 Commissioners meeting in Madison, Indiana.

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**About Kentucky Waterways Alliance:** *Working statewide for over 17 years, Kentucky Waterways Alliance (KWA) has won better protection for Kentucky's waterways through community-based efforts, advocacy, and education. With a mission to protect and restore Kentucky's waterways, our work is making a difference in the quality of life for all Kentuckians one victory at a time. Visit KWA at: [www.KWAlliance.org](http://www.KWAlliance.org).*