

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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October 28, 2008

NC Environmental Management Commission Public Hearing
NC Division of Air Quality
Parker-Lincoln Building, Room AQ-526
2728 Capital Blvd.
Raleigh, NC 27604

Marion Deerhake, Chair
Air Quality Committee
Environmental Management Commission

Re: 15A NCAC 2Q .0700 Toxic Air Pollutants

Commissioner Deerhake, I speak on behalf of the statewide Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. Thank you so much for hearing our concerns and recommendations.

We the people have a growing understanding of the dangers of deregulation—irresponsible, negligent deregulation. Now here comes the North Carolina Division of Air Quality with a proposal to deregulate more than 1,400 big air pollution sources. And they are using sleight-of-hand tricks to mask the harm.

Today the NC Environmental Management Commission is receiving public comments on this proposal to gut the health-based standards; standards which have been in effect for decades. If adopted, the exemption would remove forever the requirement that industrial boilers limit air poisons at the property boundary. These boilers include coal-fired power plants, asphalt plants, paper mills and more. The poisons which these plants would never have to limit include arsenic, benzene, formaldehyde, hydrogen sulfide and more than a hundred others.

DAQ has added insult to potential injury by justifying the boiler exemption with a large human exposure study. The fatal flaw in the study is the use of an EPA computer model which measures inhalation only. For nearly twenty years the hardworking Science Advisory Board has conducted detailed analyses of air poisons to create the existing toxic air pollutant rules. The SAB sets specific limits for each toxin based on human exposure through every pollution pathway: water, soil and ingestion as well as inhalation. Toxic compounds deposited on soil, plants and water may be metabolized by microorganisms and ingested by fish, other animals and humans. Fat-soluble bio-accumulative substances concentrate in dairy products.

I repeat: the Human Exposure Model estimates risk from inhalation only. It cannot capture the health risks posed by, for example, formaldehyde, which is water soluble. The HEM under-reports the health impacts of dioxin—the world's most dangerous poison. People living near smokestacks must be protected from the ingestion of dioxin.

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The state's study tells only a piece of the truth, the effect of which is a lie. The lie is that these industrial boilers are safe.

The question is obvious: why would anyone propose this exemption at all? The answer is also obvious: coal plants, asphalt plants, paper mills and others cannot now meet the pollution limits. We say if they can not meet these health-protective standards, the companies need to add pollution controls.

Moreover, the DAQ's cost-benefit analysis which underlies the economic hardship loophole fails to take into account the costs to families of emergency room visits, missed work and school, health insurance, medicines and equipment, and chronic conditions.

Because of snowfall, frozen pipes and power outages, I request on behalf of our western NC members that you extend the comment period and hold a second hearing in Asheville.

The NC Environmental Management Commission and the toxic air pollutant rules themselves are all that stand between industrial boiler smokestack pollution and our neighborhoods. We urge you to exercise your authority and vote to eliminate these dangerous loopholes. At the very least, we request that the EMC submit a list of the state's industrial boilers for air pollution modeling. Today you have too much misinformation and not enough facts.

Respectfully,

Janet Marsh
Executive Director