

## MERCURY POLLUTION

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# *S.C. deserves better than coal-fired plant*

BY ANGELA LEE

**O**n Nov. 8, a public hearing was held in Pamplico at the town's high school gym to allow people the opportunity to give commentary on Santee Cooper's plans to build a \$1 billion, coal-fired power plant. The major point of contention for area environmentalists who attended was the potential of the plant to further pollute our area's soil and water with mercury, a deadly neurotoxin. Opponents included representatives from The Coastal Conservation League, Pee Dee River Watchers and The S.C. Wildlife Federation.

Although their concerns were largely dismissed by supporters of the proposed plant who attended, including a busload of Alcoa, Nucor and Santee Cooper representatives, as well as Pamplico

Mayor Gene Gainey, there is cause to be concerned.

Coal-fired utility boilers are the single largest source of anthropogenic mercury (mercury created by human activities) in the U.S. Mercury is a fundamental element — once in the environment, it stays there. It does not rot or degrade into a less-dangerous substance. Currently, every major river basin in the S.C. Lowcountry is tainted with mercury. Because of this sort of pollution, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and 43 states (including our own) warn against eating several species of fish such as pike, bass, shark, swordfish and mackerel. Further, because of exposure to mercury through consumption of contaminated fish, as many as 10 percent of women of childbearing age in South Carolina have enough mercury in their bloodstreams to

put their children at risk for adverse health effects.

South Carolina is ranked among the eight worst states for mercury pollution (along with Michigan, Maryland, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas). South Carolina deserves better. I feel this risk is important enough for the Department of Health and Environmental Control to rescind its current permit until more research is done in this matter.

At the hearing, DHEC passed out green folders with the legend "A Vision of Healthy People Living in Healthy Communities." DHEC, let's make the vision a reality. Please take the side of the people of this state, not Santee Cooper. Please take into consideration the environmental and human health risks of this plant before issuing the final air permit.

*The writer lives in Conway.*