

# Mesaba Energy Project Health Risk

As healthcare providers in Itasca County, we feel the public should be aware of the health risks and public health costs associated with the coal gasification plant/Mesaba Energy Project proposed by Excelsior Energy. The environmental pollutants from this plant will put the public at risk for adverse health effects. Excelsior Energy's permit application clearly documents the expected adverse public health and environmental impacts for Itasca County, Minnesota, and beyond.

Utilization of coal for energy produces emissions such as particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxide, and volatile organic compounds (VOC) along with mercury and other heavy metals, all of which put our health and the environment at risk.

The Mesaba Energy Project would annually emit more than 440 tons of particulate matter, 1300 tons of sulfur, 2700 tons of nitrous oxides, 150 tons of VOC, and up to 54 lbs of mercury. Excelsior's data reveals a "measurable effect on air quality" 70-80 km distant, with a "peak impact near the plant." They admit that areas with a higher proportion of "older residents will have higher estimated risks owing to their higher background mortality risk". Particulate matter (soot), sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxides, and volatile organic compounds contribute to premature death and illness, especially for those who have chronic heart and lung disease. By Excelsior's own admission, this plant would be responsible for 10.7 premature deaths in the United States each year with 24% of those in Minnesota. The same study predicts 100 people with asthma exacerbations, 791 "minor restricted activity days", and 18,313 lost work days due to illness attributed to this power plant.

The mercury emitted from this plant will affect most of our local lakes. Every lake in Minnesota has fish consumption advisories for mercury. Mercury can cause problems for anyone who eats fish regularly, and is especially of concern for women of childbearing age and children. Mercury is responsible for many neurological problems such as impaired language and motor development, decreased memory, and poor attention. The "mercury deposition impact zone" of this project will increase the mercury levels in over 720 local lakes. Over 7,000 women of childbearing age reside in this region. In addition, low level chronic exposure to mercury via fish consumption has been shown to increase the risk of heart attack, especially in men.

The public health cost of the Mesaba Energy project can also be quantified in dollars. A study published by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy in June 2006 indicates that in Minnesota, childhood disease caused by pollution costs \$1.56 billion per year. Excelsior's data predict the cost of mortality (death) attributable to the Mesaba Project at \$8.7 million/yr in Minnesota and \$84.9 million/yr nationally. The cost of lost work days could easily be millions of dollars per year, and the cost of medical care would also be substantial.

We encourage local business leaders and elected officials to carefully consider the public health and environmental costs associated with the Mesaba Energy Project. A healthy local economy is essential for a healthy community; however, we are concerned that this project is not consistent with our goal of improved health for the citizens of Itasca County.

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**Please attend the MPUC Public Hearings  
December 20th • 1pm and 5pm • Taconite Community Center**

**This letter represents the opinion of the individuals listed above,  
but is not necessarily the formal position of a specific health care system**