Memorandum of Support

S.1676-A Grisanti/A.8084 Sweeney

Summary
This bill amends the Environmental Conservation Law in relation to the collection of mercury containing thermostats. The legislation requires manufacturers of mercury thermostats to submit a plan to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) establishing a collection program for out-of-service thermostats by June 1, 2014. This will include providing thermostat wholesalers in NY with a container for collection; establishing a system to collect, transport, recycle, dispose and properly manage mercury thermostats from collection sites; and conducting extensive education and outreach efforts. The target goal of collection in the first year is 15,500 thermostats and allows the DEC to set goals for future years. Additional flexibility of the program is allowed to achieve maximum efficiency in thermostat collection.

Explanation
Mercury is a hazard and a threat to both the citizens and the environment in New York when not disposed properly. Mercury is persistent, bio-accumulative, and toxic. Acute poisoning can lead to numbness, hearing and speech impairment, coma, or even death.1 High levels of exposure have been associated with decreased motor function and memory (especially in children and fetuses), respiratory, immune, cardiac, reproductive, and genetic disorders.2

Environmental risks of mercury are severe as well. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Mercury in the air may settle into water bodies and affect water quality. This airborne mercury can fall to the ground in raindrops, in dust, or simply due to gravity (known as ‘air deposition’). After the mercury falls, it can end up in streams, lakes, or estuaries, where it can be transferred to methylmercury through microbial activity. Methylmercury accumulates in fish at levels that may harm the fish and the other animals that eat them.”3 Effects of this mercury exposure on wildlife can include: reduced fertility, slower growth and development, abnormal behavior, and even death.

Because of high levels of mercury, the Department of Health advises women and children not to eat certain species of fish caught in the Adirondacks and Catskills – including largemouth and smallmouth bass.

The existing voluntary collection program in NY only captures about 1.3% of thermostats. This bill would help to effectively manage this source of preventable pollution.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Urges Your Support Of S.1676-A/A.8084

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3 http://www.epa.gov/hg/sco.htm