

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

**Windsor**

## **DTE targeted over pollution**

**Environmentalist blames river mercury emissions on power plants, but company says they meet regulations.**

**Jim Lynch / The Detroit News**

**WINDSOR** -- A month from now, DTE Energy officials are expected in Canadian court to answer year-old charges of polluting the St. Clair River.

But this week, local power providers like DTE faced new attacks from environmentalist Robert Kennedy Jr. for the damage being done to the Detroit River by coal-fired power plants.

Kennedy, president of the New York-based Waterkeeper Alliance, used a Sunday appearance in Windsor to hammer power companies for mercury emissions that have negatively impacted human and animal habitats.

Kennedy said high cancer incidence rates in Windsor, including thyroid cancers, are attributable to mercury contamination in the Detroit River.

"That's assault and battery and worse because you can die from it," Kennedy said. "What's the difference if you die from a brain tumor or if you die from a bullet? There's no difference."

Mercury is a toxin that can move from power plant stacks into local bodies of water, causing neurological and cardiovascular problems in humans.

Kennedy's comments weren't the first time an official with Waterkeeper Alliance has tangled with local power companies.

In March 2007, the group's legal director, Scott Edwards, filed a lawsuit against DTE under the Canadian Fisheries Act. After months of legal wrangling, the Superior Court of Ontario in January issued a summons for DTE officials to appear and answer the charges against them. That hearing will take place in late May.

Edwards targeted two specific plants in his lawsuit: the Belle River Power Plant in China Township and the St. Clair Power Plant in East China Township. Those Michigan-based plants, he argued, sit along the St. Clair River and contribute to mercury exposure across the way in Canada.

DTE officials have maintained that they have complied with all regulatory directives regarding mercury emissions, including no small infusion of company funds.

"We're currently spending \$1 billion to reduce mercury and other emissions from our operations," said DTE spokesman Scott Simons. "We're in compliance with state regulations."

Simons also stated there is no definitive evidence that plant emissions have contributed to mercury found in area fish habitats.