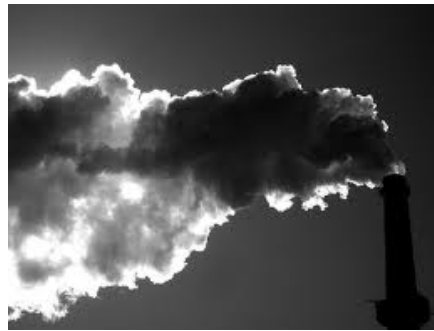




## Power Plant/Utility Air Toxics Rules: Background Factsheet



### **What harmful pollutants do power plants emit?**

- **Mercury:** Coal-fired power plants are the largest single source of mercury pollution in the United States accounting for 1/3 of all U.S. emissions. Mercury (Hg) pollution released from smokestacks eventually settles on land and in water where it can accumulate in fish and shellfish and ultimately make its way onto our plates.
- **Other air toxics:** Power plants are also the single worst emitter of lead, arsenic, and a leading source of chromium emissions
- **Harmful pollutants not listed as “hazardous air pollutants.”** They also are among the worst emitters of nitrogen oxides (NOx), sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (PM).

### **What are the health effects of power plant pollution?**

- **Mercury** is linked to lowered IQs, learning disabilities, and at high doses, cerebral palsy.
- **Particle matter** from power plants cause and worsen respiratory illnesses like asthma, emphysema, and bronchitis.
- Heart attacks have been associated with even short-term air pollution exposure.
- According to a 2010 report by the Clean Air Task Force, toxic air pollution from coal-fired power plants cause over **13,000 premature deaths, 10,000 hospitalizations** and more than **20,000 heart attacks each year**.

### **How can power plants reduce harmful emissions?**

- Power plants can incorporate existing technology like scrubbers and activated carbon to reduce harmful emissions.
- Importantly, the installation and maintenance of air pollution control technology will happen here in the United States creating jobs protecting the public from harmful pollution.



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**Overview:** Under the 1990 Clean Air Act (CAA), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must set national emission standards for major sources of hazardous air pollutants. “Hazardous air pollutants” are the pollutants that Congress listed as “hazardous” in the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. They include metals like mercury, lead and chromium, toxic organic chemicals such as dioxins, PCBs and benzene, and toxic acids such as cyanide, chlorine gas, and hydrogen chloride. The national emission standards for these toxic pollutants (known as “maximum achievable control technology”) or MACT standards are set separately for each category of major industrial polluter. They require the plants in each category to reduce each of the hazardous air pollutants they emit by the maximum degree of reduction that can be achieved through all possible control measures.

Coal and oil-fired power plants are the single worst emitter of hazardous air pollutants in the nation. Remarkably, although EPA has set air toxics standards for almost every other category of major polluter, the agency does not have rules governing toxic air pollution from power plants. Because the air toxics rule for power plants is now long overdue, a host of public health and environmental groups initiated a lawsuit to require the EPA to establish them. Under a court order issued in this lawsuit, the EPA must issue a proposed air toxics rule for power plants by March 16, 2011 and a final rule by November 16, 2011. Power plants will then have up to 36 months to specify and install control equipment to meet a compliance deadline of November 2014, although individual plants that need more time to install pollution control equipment may seek an additional one year extension.

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