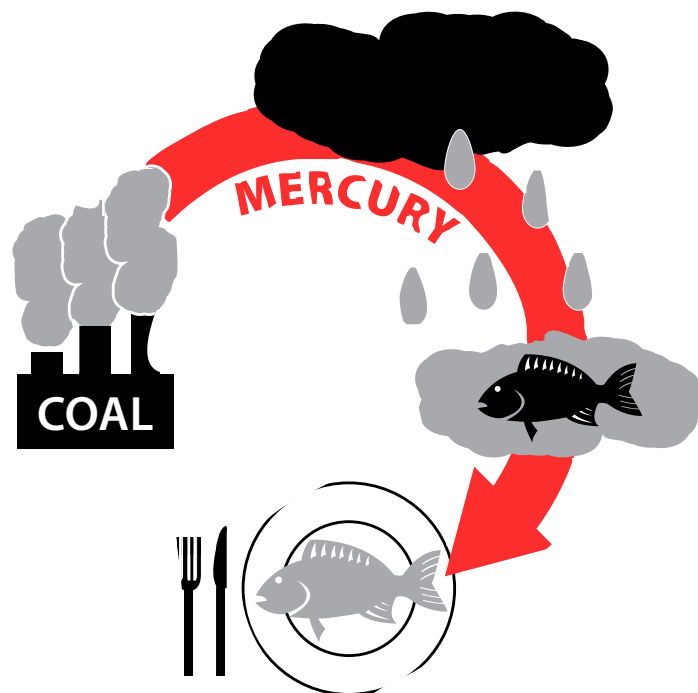




EPA Mercury and Air Toxics Standard for Power Plants

ON MARCH 16, 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed updated Clean Air Act safeguards to reduce hazardous air pollution from power plants, including mercury, arsenic, acid gases, dioxins, and other pollutants known as “air toxics.”

This move by EPA to protect public health will save lives, prevent disease, and avoid hospitalizations, while creating new jobs installing air pollution-control equipment. EPA’s Mercury and Air Toxics Standard for Power Plants is also known as



the “Power Plant MACT (Maximum Achievable Control Technology) Standard.”

MERCURY AND AIR TOXICS THREATEN OUR FAMILIES’ HEALTH

Millions of tons of air toxics are released into the air annually from sources such as coal-fired power plants, cement- and brick-manufacturing facilities, and other industrial processes. In addition to mercury and arsenic, power plants emit lead, dioxins, and acid gases that are known threats to public health.

Mercury is a particularly harmful air toxic. It builds up in the environment, and human exposure is most common through consumption of contaminated fish. Mercury is a potent neurotoxin especially dangerous to pregnant women and their unborn children—exposure can cause brain damage and developmental delays. The mercury contamination problem in the United States is so widespread that at least one in 12—and as many as one in six—women of childbearing age has mercury

Mercury and Air Toxics Are Dangerous

ACCORDING TO EPA, air toxics are hazardous air pollutants that are known or suspected of causing:

- cancer
- respiratory illnesses
- reproductive problems
- neurological damage
- immune system damage
- eye irritation

levels in her blood high enough to put an unborn child at risk for mercury poisoning.

Coal plants are the largest source of unregulated mercury emissions in the United States, pumping out 48 tons of the toxin every year. Yet one gram of mercury deposited annually from the atmosphere, over time, is enough to contaminate a 20-acre lake, such that fish that are unsafe to consume on a regular basis.

MERCURY AND AIR TOXICS POLLUTE OUR WATER

Mercury contaminates more than six million acres of freshwater lakes, 46,000 miles of streams, and 225,000 acres of wetlands across the United States. In fact, all 50 states have some type of fish-consumption advisory, including recommendations for pregnant women not to eat locally caught fish. Studies show that deep reductions of mercury levels in fish tissue result very quickly from reductions in mercury emissions from nearby sources.

EPA'S PROPOSED MERCURY AND AIR TOXICS STANDARD

The proposed Mercury and Air Toxics Standard would require coal-fired power plants to reduce emissions of mercury by 91 percent, hydrochloric acid by 91 percent, and particulate matter by 55 percent. The proposed protection will also result in reduced emissions of other toxic pollutants, including lead, arsenic, dioxin, sulfur dioxide, and others.

REDUCING TOXIC POLLUTION ALSO BOOSTS THE ECONOMY

EPA's standards are based on the top-performing facilities around the United States that are already utilizing cost-effective and efficient pollution-control technologies.

Existing power plants will, over time, be required to improve their facilities to match these top performers. As noted before, this technology already exists and is cost-effective. This straight-forward approach closes loopholes and establishes a level economic playing field, ensuring that power plants with good pollution controls are not at an economic disadvantage compared to competitors with no controls.

In addition, EPA estimates that the new standard could generate more than 30,000 short-term construction jobs and 9,000 long-term utility jobs, benefiting steelmakers, pipefitters, boilermakers and others.

Health Benefits of EPA's Proposed Mercury and Air Toxics Standard

ACCORDING TO EPA, the value of air-quality improvements totals \$59 billion to \$140 billion annually. This means that for every dollar spent to reduce the pollution, Americans get \$5–13 in benefits. Specifically, EPA estimates that the standard would result in these estimated health benefits annually by 2015:

- 17,000 pre-mature deaths avoided
- 11,000 heart attacks avoided
- 120,000 asthma attacks avoided
- 12,200 hospital and emergency room visits avoided
- 4,500 cases of chronic bronchitis avoided

WE NEED STRONG MERCURY AND AIR TOXICS PROTECTIONS FROM EPA

Study after study shows that to protect public health, polluters must significantly reduce the amount of toxic air pollution coming out of their smokestacks, and that means cleaning up pollution from dirty coal plants. Yet for decades, the power sector has fought to delay commonsense Clean Air Act requirements that will reduce the toxic air emissions from their facilities.

Until EPA finalizes the proposed standard, our communities will continue paying for the costs of toxic air pollution with sometimes deadly health problems, as well as unfishable rivers, lakes, and streams. It's past time to stand up to polluters and defend public health.

EPA HAS A RECORD OF SUCCESS UNDER THE CLEAN AIR ACT

In the 40 years since Americans demanded its creation, EPA has saved millions of lives by enforcing clean air and water standards. More than 1.7 million asthma attacks and \$110 billion in health costs were avoided in 2010 alone thanks to the agency's efforts. A strong air toxics safeguard from EPA will protect American families from life-threatening air pollution, help clean up our air, and create jobs.

VISIT [HTTP://ACTION.SIERRACLUB.ORG/MERCURY](http://action.sierraclub.org/mercury) TO TELL EPA TO ADOPT THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE PROTECTIONS AGAINST AIR TOXICS LIKE MERCURY.