

Mercury and Air Toxics: Threats to Public Health

Why protections are needed:

Mercury, arsenic, acid gases and other air toxics are some of the most hazardous air pollutants to public health.

Power plants comprise the largest source of air toxics, such as mercury. Cement and brick plants, pulp and paper mills and other industrial boilers are also major contributors of toxic air pollution. Even in small amounts these extremely harmful air pollutants are linked to health problems such as cancer, heart disease, neurological damage, birth defects, asthma attacks and even premature death.

In March 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a new air quality standard to protect Americans against life-threatening air pollution such as mercury and arsenic. The EPA is scheduled to issue the final Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) on December 16, 2011. This is the first time coal-fired power plants will have federal limits on the amount of mercury they can release into the environment. The new protections will reduce mercury pollution by **91%**

Reducing mercury pollution decreases other harmful pollutants:

In addition to mercury, air toxics emitted from power plants and other major industrial sources include **acid gases, benzene, dioxins and furans, formaldehyde, lead, arsenic, and radioactive materials like radium and uranium.**

Decreasing air toxics can also lead to reductions in other dangerous pollutants, especially particulate matter. The coal burning process produces fine particles (or PM 2.5) that can travel deep into the lungs of those breathing the polluted air, worsening asthma and bronchitis and resulting in increased number of heart attacks, strokes and premature deaths.

Impact on Health, Economy

Mercury is a serious threat to human life; exposure causes severe health risks to humans – especially young children and developing fetuses.

At least 1 in 12 and as many as 1 in 6 women of childbearing age have levels of mercury high enough to impact an unborn child – impairing cognitive thinking, memory, attention, language, and fine motor and visual spatial skills. Mercury has been linked to brain damage and neurological and developmental problems, including learning disabilities and autism.

The MATS will have a significant impact on human health – in 2015 the standards are estimated to prevent 17,000 premature deaths; 11,000 heart attacks; 120,000 asthma attacks; 12,200 hospital visits; and 4,500 cases of chronic bronchitis.

These standards will also help the economy in terms of avoided sick days and health care costs. It will also create over 30,000 short-term construction jobs and 9,000 long-term utility jobs.



Stop the Congressional attack on public health protection!

The EPA should be commended for moving forward with strong clean air standards aimed at protecting kids from mercury and other toxins. Polluters and their lobbyists would prefer to block this common sense public health protection by scaring Americans into thinking the rule will impact electricity grid reliability or jobs. These are scare tactics that should be rejected; thousands of American lives will be saved by this action.

Protecting kids from harmful air pollutants like mercury, arsenic, dioxin and acid gases must be a public health priority. Moving forward with this rule will save thousands of American lives, spur innovation and job creation, and protect our communities. Any attempt to block the mercury standard is an assault on clean air and public health.



PA— the 2nd Most Toxic State in the U.S

The new Mercury and Air Toxics Standards will be especially beneficial for Pennsylvania, which has been identified as the second highest state for mercury pollution. Home to five of the top 25 worst polluting facilities in the nation, every year the state releases more than 15,500 lbs of toxic mercury into the air. This causes approximately 1,359 premature deaths every year.

Pennsylvania warns the public not to eat fish from several bodies of water due to toxic pollution. Some of the contaminated waters include: Delaware River Basin, Susquehanna River Basin, Ohio River Basin, Lake Erie River Basin, and the Potomac River.

How can I take action?

Rolling back clean air and public health protections through lethal legislation or irresponsible obstruction is an attack on the health of our families and communities. Protecting public health, especially that of children must be a priority. Congress must not interfere with EPA's Mercury and Air Toxics Rule.

Please contact your senators and let them know your support EPA's mandate to protect public health. The Mercury and Air Toxics Rule will significantly reduce emissions of mercury, lead, arsenic and acid gases from power plants.

Threatening to delay or block this and other clean air rules from EPA will endanger American families with dangerous pollution emitted by coal-fired

Contact your Senators:

Senator Pat Toomey (R- PA)
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Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr. (D- PA)
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Senator Frank R. Lautenberg (D – NJ)
(202) 224-3224

Senator Robert Menendez (D – NJ)
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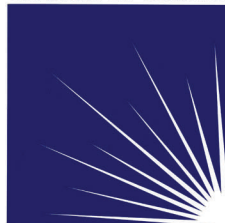
Senator Thomas Carper (D -DE)
(202) 224-2441

Senator Christopher Coons (D-DE)
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Further contact information for your Senators can be found here:

<http://www.senate.gov/index.htm>

Clean Air Council



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