

Fact Sheet, Minnesota Clean Air Coalition.

EPA's New Mercury and Air Toxic Rules: A Great Help to Minnesota.

The EPA has issued a new rule to regulate mercury emissions from electrical generation plants. Here is EPA's discussion of the rule.

<http://www.epa.gov/airquality/powerplanttoxics/>

The EPA rule has faced strong opposition from some, but not all, of the electrical generation industry. It can be expected that further vigorous attempts to weaken or curtail the application of the rule will be undertaken, and it is important that the President and Congress support EPA in this rulemaking.

Mercury pollution has long been a major concern in Minnesota, primarily because Mercury, primarily from coal-fired power plants gets into the fish we eat and causes serious health problems. Minnesota has more fishermen (and fisherwomen) than any state except California. Over 1300 of Minnesota's favorite fishing lakes have been tested, and ninety percent of those are impaired due to Mercury levels in fish. Eating more than one meal of fish from those lakes per week is not advised, and the danger is greatest for women of childbearing age, unborn children and for children.¹ Eating mercury-contaminated fish can cause neurological defects such as brain deficiencies (thinking, memory, attention, and language
And fine motor skills.²

For Lake Superior, the Minnesota Department of Health now advises the public not to eat more than one Lake Trout meal every week, if the fish is smaller than 23 inches, larger fish are more of a problem, and should not be eaten more than once a month. There are also advisory for Superior Chinook salmon. See

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/fish/eating/lakesuperior.html>

¹ Reducing Mercury Emissions from Power Plants in Minnesota, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, P-p2S4-08

² US EPA, Mercury web page, <http://www.epa.gov/hg/effects.htm>

Most Mercury pollution (about 90 percent) comes from outside the state, so even if Minnesota were to eliminate all sources, the problem would still be serious, absent the reduction in emissions from outside Minnesota. That is why the new National Standard for Mercury and Air Toxics being issued by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, is so important to Minnesota. Its also important the US become a leader, in order to persuade other countries to regulate this global pollutant. .

Until 2006 Minnesota lacked any legal authority to require such reductions. In 2006 the legislature took a halfway measure, giving the MPCA authority to require mercury reductions from 6 of the largest electric power generating units (which produced about 50 percent of the power plant emissions.). Some voluntary reductions have been also achieved by converting some large coal plants to natural gas, or by burning low mercury coal. The new regulations will give the agency the power to regulate mercury emissions from the remainder of the generating plants While it does not apply to taconite plants, which generate about 20 percent of Minnesota's mercury emissions, a major study is due to be completed soon, which will demonstrate the extent to which mercury can feasibly be removed from the emissions of the Taconite processing plants in Northeast Minnesota.

In addition to Mercury, the new regulations will authorize the regulations of emissions of arsenic, chromium, lead, nickel and acid gases, and should ultimately reduce such emissions from power plants by 91 percent, thereby preventing premature deaths, heart attacks and asthma attacks³. EPA estimates that the annual benefits, including the avoidance of up to 17,000 premature deaths annually, will be between \$59 billion and \$140 billion⁴

³ ." Lisa Jackson, EPA administrator, at a press conference in March 16, 2011, Pittsburg Post Gazette, March 17, 2011.

⁴ . From a Congressional Research Service Report on EPA regulations initiated since January 2009:

The EPA estimates that once the measure is fully implemented, the reduction in emissions from power plants will prevent 17,000 premature deaths, 11,000 heart attacks, 12,000 emergency department visits and hospital admissions, and 850,000 lost days of work due to illness each year.

For children, the measure is expected to prevent 120,000 cases of childhood asthma symptoms and 11,000 cases of acute bronchitis each year. Acid gases and particulate pollution are known triggers for asthma.

The cost of implementing the rule is expected to be about \$10 billion a year, but Lisa Jackson, EPA administrator has noted that would be more than offset by the total health and economic benefit, which the EPA estimates will be as high as \$140 billion a year by 2016.⁵

.....Stop.....

This fact sheet was prepared by Chuck Dayton, on behalf of Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light and the Clean Air Defense Coalition. In addition to the sources cited, interviews were conducted with MPCA staff, including Edward Swain, Anne Jackson, and Bruce Monson, as well as DNR staff Michael Berndt.

Additional materials.

Here is a helpful article featuring quotes from industry insiders:

<http://thinkprogress.org/romm/2011/12/12/387641/two-big-utilities-debunk-wall-street-journal-industry-lies-about-clean-air-reliability/>

Great NPR story on mercury rule:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/12/13/143592187/epa-to-unveil-new-rules-for-power-plants>

⁵ See fin 3, above