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## EPA gets giant thank-you for anti-pollution work

In an era of Washington politics that often loathes regulation and bashes bureaucracies, it's not often that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is praised for its efforts to protect the environment and human health.

By: [John Myers](#), Duluth News Tribune

In an era of Washington politics that often loathes regulation and bashes bureaucracies, it's not often that the EPA is praised for the rules they impose to protect the environment and human health.

But that's what happened Wednesday in Duluth.

Representatives of environmental, public health and church groups, as well as a city councilor descended on the EPA to thank the agency and Obama administration for enacting new regulations that will curb the amount of mercury emitted by power plants.

The groups offered a giant thank-you card emblazoned with a walleye along with a poster drawn by Girl Scouts. The EPA accepted the gifts.

In December, the EPA released its new rules that order coal-fired and oil burning power plants to cut emissions of mercury, arsenic, nickel, selenium and cyanide — to levels no higher than those emitted by the cleanest power plants.

The new rules are expected to cut mercury pollution from power plants by 90 percent and reduce the number of mercury-covered air pollutants.

"It was a wonderful holiday gift and it's sure to keep giving," said John Doberstein of Duluth, a Sierra Club member.

Pastor David Carlson of Duluth's Gloria Dei Lutheran Church said Scripture talks of a "ruah," the spirit or breath of God for the Earth. The government has moved as if inspired by that spirit, Carlson said, by acting to protect "the Earth from the effects of air pollutants like mercury.

"On behalf of the faith community, thank you for keeping your promise. For our good and the good of all creatures."

Power plants emit about half the airborne mercury produced in the U.S., although they are only part of what is emitted from coal and other fossil fuels are burned — and from volcanoes and some other natural sources — and then fall to the ground.

Some mercury falls close to its source but some can travel around the world. Mercury that falls in Minnesota is tracked by state pollution control officials.

That mercury can become toxic as it moves through the environment, and it can build up in small creatures like eagles and people. It's that toxic mercury in fish that has spurred public health warnings to limit meals of fish from across the Northland. Too much mercury can cause severe developmental problems in children and fetuses.

Other air pollution reductions under the new rules will help reduce lung and heart problems, supporters say. The EPA estimates regulations will be nearly \$10 million. But the agency also estimates the yearly benefits will be as much as \$100 million from people who are sick or die from air pollution-related diseases.

The EPA says the rules will prevent as many as 11,000 premature deaths and 4,700 heart attacks a year, as well as asthma symptoms.

About 12 percent of the nation's coal-fired power plants already meet the standards. About 48 percent have some standards. About 40 percent have no controls, the EPA said last month.

Some utility industry officials have said the new regulations will cost jobs, raise the cost of energy and hurt small businesses. An analysis done for the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity said Wednesday's regulations, could cost an average of 183,000 jobs annually for the next eight years.

The new rules may have less impact on Minnesota utilities that already have moved to reduce their dependence on older power plants. The state is requiring utilities such as Duluth-based Minnesota Power to switch to renewable sources by 2025, and utilities also are moving toward phasing out older coal-burning units.

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