



The Trump Admin Rolls Back Limits to Toxic Air Pollution from Power Plants

On Friday, February 20, 2026, the Trump administration announced it is rolling back clean air regulations that limit mercury and other hazardous pollutants from power plants. The rollback will lead to greater emissions of mercury, heavy metals, and increase the risk of cancer, lung, and heart disease for communities living near coal power plants.¹

What is the Mercury and Air Toxic Standard?

The Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) limit mercury and other toxic emissions from coal- and oil-fired power plants. Section 112 of the Clean Air Act requires EPA to regulate hazardous air pollutants, including mercury and other toxic metals, from power plants.

Rollback Timeline²

- 2012: EPA establishes standards regulating mercury and air toxics (MATS).
- 2020: The first Trump EPA conducts a residual risk and technology review and finds that the 2012 standards did not need to be updated because the standards provided sufficient safety to public health and the environment.
- 2024: The Biden EPA, as part of its residual risk and technology review, finds that emissions control technology and methods require updating the 2012 standards. The Biden EPA introduces and finalizes stricter requirements by:
 - ◆ Tightening the filterable particulate matter (fPM) emissions limits
 - ◆ Mandating the use of continuous particulate matter monitoring systems.
 - ◆ Requiring lignite-fired power plants to meet the same mercury emission limits as other coal-fired plants.
- 2025: The Trump administration proposes to roll back the 2024 revisions.
- 2026: The Trump administration finalizes the rollback of the 2024 revisions and reinstates the 2012 standards.

¹ Environmental Protection Agency. (n.d.). EPA.

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-continues-reverse-democrats-war-beautiful-clean-coal-finalizes-repeal-costly>

² <https://eelp.law.harvard.edu/tracker/mercury-and-air-toxics-standardsWell-being/>

What is the Impact on our Health and Well-being? Who Is Most at Risk?

- Coal-fired power plants are a major source of mercury and other toxic air pollutant emissions.
- Mercury is a powerful toxic pollutant that accumulates in fish and affects humans and animals that eat fish. Emissions of mercury from power plants end up in our soil and waterways and lead back to us in concentrated amounts through the food chain. Even in small quantities, exposure to mercury can cause damage to the brain, nervous system, kidneys, and liver and lead to neurological and developmental birth defects. The pollutant is especially harmful to children and pregnant women.³
- Along with mercury, coal-fired power plants also emit toxins such as arsenic, chromium, lead, formaldehyde, acid gases, dioxins, and furans. Exposure to these pollutants can harm the eyes, skin, kidneys, lungs, and the nervous system and lead to cancer and cardiovascular disease.⁴
- Low-income communities and communities of color bear a disproportionate share of the effects of air pollution because they live closer to industrial facilities, including power plants, and to high traffic areas.
- Studies have repeatedly found that communities with relatively high poverty levels are more likely to host coal-fired power plants for several reasons, including utility companies pursuing the path of least resistance⁵.
- Vulnerable populations—such as children, the elderly, and those with existing respiratory conditions—are especially at risk of harm from exposure to toxic air pollution.⁶
- The 2024 monitoring requirements, which have now been rolled back, would have led to greater transparency for communities living near sources of toxic air pollution.
- The rollback represents the rollback of \$300 million in health benefits and \$130 million in climate benefits.⁷

³ Association, A. L. (n.d.-b). *Reducing air pollution from power plants*. American Lung Association. <https://www.lung.org/blog/reducing-air-pollution>

⁴ American Lung Association. (2011). Toxic air - the case for cleaning up coal-fired power plants. <https://www.lung.org/getmedia/c3b2b744-7c7e-4941-b0cd-5a5e468515d1/toxic-air-report.pdf.pdf>

⁵ E.D. McCoy Which Came First, Coal-Fired Power Plants or Communities of Color? Masters, University of Michigan, Assessing the disparate siting hypothesis of environmental injustice (2017) <https://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/137941>; I. Mikati, A.F. Benson, T.J. Luben, J.D. Sacks, J. Richmond-Bryant Disparities in distribution of particulate matter emission sources by race and poverty status *Am. J. Public Health*, 108 (2018), pp. 480–485, [10.2105/AJPH.2017.304297](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304297)

⁶ Cranmer, Z., Steinfield, L., Miranda, J., & Stohler, T. (2023). Energy distributive injustices: Assessing the demographics of communities surrounding renewable and fossil fuel power plants in the United States. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 100, 103050. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103050>

⁷ EPA. (2024). FACT SHEET EPA's Final Rule to Strengthen and Update the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards for Power Plants . https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-04/6716-3-2060-av53_mats_rtr_20240417_admin.pdf

