



Fact Sheet: EPA's Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS)

The EPA's proposed MATS rule will limit dangerous emissions from coal-fired power plants – the country's largest source of mercury and toxic air pollution. As a result, the MATS rule would protect public health and generate billions of dollars in economic benefit each year. Blocking the rule from taking effect would make it nearly impossible to cut down on these dangerous and costly emissions, putting America's health, environment, and economy at risk.

The MATS Rule Would Cut Toxic Emissions and Protect Public Health

- **Power plants are leading emitters of dangerous toxic pollutants.** Power plants are the dominant emitters of mercury in the United States, producing 50% of emissions. Power plants are also responsible for 77% of acid gas emissions, 62% of arsenic emissions, and 60% of sulfur dioxide emissions. [[EPA](#), 4/10/12]
- **Mercury pollution constitutes a serious threat to public health.** Mercury emissions from power plants and other sources settle into waterways, creating a threat to public health by accumulating in the fish we eat. Once in the human body, mercury acts as a neurotoxin that can damage the brain and nervous system. In adults, mercury poisoning can harm fertility, memory, vision, and nervous system function. Children are particularly vulnerable, and even low doses can lead to developmental delays and learning disabilities. Mercury in a mother's body can harm a fetus, causing brain damage, blindness, seizures, and other disabilities. [[NRDC](#); [CDC](#)]
- **Power plant pollution can also cause cancer.** Power plants emit heavy metals and toxics like arsenic, lead, chromium, nickel, and acid gases that can cause cancer, harm development and the nervous system, and cause other serious health effects. [[EPA](#), 12/21/11]; [CDC](#)]
- **The MATS rule would significantly reduce toxic emissions.** The MATS rule would put new controls in place that would limit toxic emissions from existing coal and oil-fired power plants. Existing sources of pollution will generally have up to four years to comply with the new rule, which will require coal or oil-fired plants larger than 25 megawatts to take steps to limit their toxic emissions and meet national standards. Some plants that need another year to meet the standards can get additional time. Emissions limits would be put in place for mercury, heavy metals (measured through particulate

matter that contains these toxic metals), hydrochloric acid, and other dangerous pollutants. [\[EPA, 12/21/11\]](#);

- **Cutting toxic emissions will improve public health.** The EPA estimates that the safeguard will prevent up to 11,000 premature deaths, 4,700 heart attacks, and 130,000 cases of aggravated asthma. The value of the air quality improvements for human health alone totals \$37 billion to \$90 billion each year – providing up to \$9 in benefits for every \$1 in cost. [\[EPA\]](#)

Reducing Toxic Emissions will Spur Job Creation and Economic Growth

- **Cutting emissions will provide a quick boost for construction jobs.** The construction sector was one of the hardest hit by the economic downturn and is still struggling to recover. By requiring power plants to upgrade their technology, the MATS rule will create demand for construction workers. EPA estimates that implementation of MATS will support 46,000 short-term construction jobs. [\[EPA\]](#)
- **Upgrading power plants and protecting public health will spur hiring.** The University of Massachusetts' Political Economy Research Institute estimates that when combined with the recently proposed Cross-State Air Pollution safeguard, EPA's two new air quality safeguards will create nearly 1.5 million jobs, or nearly 300,000 jobs a year on average over the next 5 years. [\[Ceres\]](#)
- **Protecting public health increases productivity.** As a result of the MATS rules, 540,000 missed work or "sick" days will be avoided each year, enhancing productivity and lowering health care costs. [\[EPA\]](#)

Cutting Emissions Will Not Threaten Electrical Reliability or Increase Prices

- **Reducing emissions from power plants will not make electricity less reliable.** Many power plants will upgrade their operations with modern and widely available pollution control technology, helping to modernize an aging fleet of power plants, most of which are over 30 years old and many of which are over 50 years old. Regional power grids have enough flexibility to meet these EPA safeguards reliably.
 - A Department of Energy study of the potential impact of the MATS rule determined that the new rule would not create any resource adequacy issues, there would be sufficient ability to balance regional supply and demand issues, and that mechanisms are available to address local or plant-specific concerns. [\[DOE\]](#)
 - Almost all of the capacity reductions will occur in areas that have substantial reserve margins, and the rule includes provisions to provide additional time if needed. As a result, the Congressional Research Service determined that it is "unlikely that electric reliability will be harmed..." [\[CRS, 1/9/12\]](#)

- In testimony to Congress on the proposed rule, FERC Commissioner John Norris stated, “...in short, based on the information I have received to date on EPA’s regulations, I am sufficiently satisfied that the reliability of the electric grid can be adequately maintained as compliance with EPA’s regulations is achieved.” [\[FERC Commissioner John Norris, 9/14/11\]](#)
- An analysis conducted by the Bipartisan Policy Center indicates that scenarios in which electric system reliability is broadly affected are unlikely to occur. [\[BPC\]](#)
- **Making power plants cleaner will not cause electricity prices to spike.** The Congressional Research Service found that while there may be some small increases in electricity prices, these increases would be measured against historic lows of such prices and, “the impact of price changes would be relatively small” compared to recent declines, “...and well within the normal range of historical price fluctuations.” [\[CRS, 1/9/12\]](#)
- **Market dynamics are behind some power plant closures, not MATS.** Power companies started announcing a number of coal plant retirements well before the MATS rule was issued. These announcements are part of a market trend driven by the sharp decline in natural gas prices, the rising cost of coal, and reduced demand for electricity. [\[Analysis Group, 2/16/12\]](#)

S.J. Res. 37 Would Eliminate EPA’s Ability to Regulate Hazardous Power Plant Pollution

- **In addition to rolling back the MATS rule, S.J. Res. 37 would likely block EPA from ever regulating coal-fired power plant pollution.** In addition to stopping the MATS rule, and all of its benefits, from taking effect, S.J.Res. 37 would prevent the EPA from issuing new standards that are substantially similar to the MATS rule. Because the Clean Air Act requires EPA to use a very specific process to reduce hazardous air pollutants from power plants, to utilize Maximum Achievable Control Technology (MACT) standards for major sources of such pollution, and because coal-fired power plants are the biggest emitters of such pollution, it would be nearly impossible to reissue a MACT rule that is both legal under the Clean Air Act and not “substantially similar” to the original MATS rule. [EPA]
- **S.J.Res.37 would prohibit EPA from issuing a mercury-only rule.** Any mercury-only rule would be “calculated under the same statutory MACT formula as the disapproved rule and thus could be construed as being substantially the same.” [EPA]
- **Opponents of clean air standards could argue that S.J.Res.37 would prevent EPA from regulating power plants without new legislation.** If S.J.Res.37 were to be enacted, “...some challengers may make an argument that an appropriate and necessary finding that relies on the same supporting information as discussed in the disapproved rule is substantially the same as the MATS rule such that the EPA may not rely on it.”

The American People Support Clean Air Standards

- **The public strongly supports EPA action on clean air standards.** According to a bipartisan poll sponsored by Ceres, 77% of voters support the MATS safeguard. In addition, 88% of Democrats, 85% of independents, and 58% of Republicans oppose Congress stopping the EPA from enacting new limits on air pollution from electric power plants. [[Ceres](#), 10/12/11]
- **Americans reject the false choice between a clean environment and a strong economy.** Nearly three quarters (73%) of voters, say that we do not have to choose between air quality and a strong economy – we can achieve both. A 2-to-1 majority (60% to 31%) believe that strengthening safeguards against pollution will create, rather than destroy, jobs by encouraging innovation. [[Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/ Perception Insight](#), 03/19/12]

Energy Company CEOs Support EPA’s New Air-Quality Safeguards

- **Top energy company executives have spoken out in favor of EPA’s new rule.** Executives at energy companies including PG&E and Exelon wrote, “Many companies...have already invested in modern air-pollution control technologies ...and the technology exists to cost effectively control such emissions, including mercury and acid gases...our companies' experience complying with air quality regulations demonstrates that regulations can yield important economic benefits, including job creation, while maintaining reliability.” [[The Wall Street Journal](#), 12/8/11]

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