

Scientists and Health Professionals Voice Concern about EPA Intent to Weaken Public Health Protections from Coal Plant Pollution

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced its plan to weaken the rules that limit the amount of air pollution that can come from coal-burning power plants¹. Included with the EPA's proposed Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) Rule is the agency's own analysis of what will happen to the health of the American people if coal plants are permitted to put more mercury, toxic chemicals, fine particles, sulfur dioxide and the nitrogen oxides that create smog into the air we all breathe.

EPA's calculation of the ACE rule's costs—up to 11 billion dollars annually from the increase in premature deaths, heart attacks, asthma, bronchitis and missed work and school days—makes a strong case against the agency's proposal. But the health threat from the ACE Rule is even worse, because missing from the EPA's calculations are the impacts of coal burning on baby's developing brains.

Coal plants emit mercury, lead, arsenic and hundreds of toxic chemicals that harm brain development even before birth. The neurological harm from mercury alone is sufficient cause for concern about the EPA's ACE Rule. And in a separate action that will only compound the health damages that the ACE Rule will cause, the EPA is also moving to weaken the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) that restrict mercury and toxic air emissions from coal plants.²

Pregnancy represents a period of particular vulnerability to a developing fetus from exposures to toxic chemicals. For example, over 600,000 babies are born every year with mercury in their bodies exceeding the level known to lower IQ.³ These babies will have reduced potential for productivity, achievement and wellbeing for their entire lives. According to EPA's own analysis, coal plants caused over 40 percent of

mercury pollution in the United States in 2016.⁴ The ACE Rule on coal plants reverses course on the progress this country has been making for over a decade to protect children from life-altering exposures to mercury.

The EPA proposal is risking the health of millions of Americans from other illnesses as well. Air pollution from coal plants causes respiratory problems like asthma,⁵ stunted lung development^{6,7} and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in children,^{8,9} chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in adults,^{10,11,12} and lung cancer.^{13,14,15} Air pollution has also been linked to effects on cognition and behavior in children^{16,17} and to the risk of childhood autism.^{18,19} Further, coal pollution causes cardiac problems like heart attacks,^{20,21} arrhythmias^{22,23} and congestive heart failure.^{24,25} These serious health conditions are dangers not only for the elderly; they also put the millions of people with diabetes and high blood pressure at greater risk. The health of these same vulnerable people is threatened by greater incidence of ischemic strokes:^{26,27} almost 800,000 people suffer strokes each year, 140,000 of which are fatal.²⁸ This is indeed a grim legacy for President Trump.

As medical professionals, health scientists and healthcare organizations, we are greatly concerned about the EPA proposal to weaken health protections from coal plant emissions. We are taking the unusual step of calling on President Trump and the EPA to reconsider and rescind the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) Rule, and to maintain critical health-protective Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) safeguards for coal plants. If President Trump and the EPA take these two actions, together they will protect the health and lives of so many Americans, both young and old, and will relieve enormous burdens for healthcare systems across the country.

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- ¹ <https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/proposal-affordable-clean-energy-ace-rule>.
- ² <https://www.eenews.net/stories/1060095511>
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- ⁴ EPA. 2014 National Emissions Inventory, version 1. Technical Support Document. December 2016
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/asthma.htm>.
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SIGNATURES

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Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

Autism Science Foundation

Cook County (Chicago) Physicians Association

Health Care Without Harm

Healthy Babies Bright Futures

International Society for Environmental Epidemiology

Learning Disabilities Association of America

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Medical Association

National WIC Association

Pesticide Action Network

Physicians for Social Responsibility

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