

Help Protect Water from Toxic Power Plant Pollution

Coal-burning power plants are the largest source of toxic water pollution in the country. For decades these plants have had a “free pass” to dump toxic wastewater into our rivers, lakes and bays. It’s time for the Administration to end the power plant industry’s unlimited permit to pollute our nation’s waters.

- Every year, **power plants dump 5.5 billion pounds of harmful water pollution**, including 1.8 billion pounds of toxic metals, into rivers, lakes, and streams.¹
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), **power plants contribute more than half of all the toxic pollutants discharged into surface water.**²
- Coal-fired power plants are by far the worst offenders — **these discharges are primarily from three different waste streams: fly ash ponds, bottom ash ponds and sludge from air flue gas desulphurization (FGD) pollution control scrubbers (“scrubber sludge”).**



Environmental and Health Effects of Power Plant Pollution

- Power plant wastewater contains **toxic metals like arsenic, boron, cadmium, selenium, lead and mercury.** Exposure to these harmful metals can cause birth defects, cancer and other health problems.
- **More than 23,000 miles of rivers and streams are contaminated with power plant wastewater and over 160 water bodies do not meet state quality standards.**
- Currently, **189 waters have fish consumption advisories** and it is **unsafe to eat fish in 38% of our nation’s surface waters** because of these toxic pollutants, which concentrate up the food chain.³
- **Nearly 40% of all plants discharge within 5 miles of a drinking water intake⁴ and approximately 400 water bodies used for drinking water sources have been degraded.⁵**
- **Despite the extent of this pollution problem, nearly 70% of coal plants in the United States currently have NO limits on the amount of toxic metals they are allowed to dump in our water.⁶**

EPA’s New Power Plant Pollution Standards

In April 2013 EPA proposed power plant water pollution standards to begin to fix this problem. These new water pollution limits will, for the first time, set technology-based national standards that limit the amount of toxic metals that are dumped into our rivers, lakes and streams. EPA has proposed eight technology-based options to address this problem. They vary in terms of which waste streams they cover and the stringency with which discharges from them are controlled. **The weakest option would only control 468 million pounds of pollution per year while the strongest option would control 5.3 billion pounds of pollution per year.** Clean Water Action supports the strongest option, ‘option 5’, which would require “dry handling” of fly ash and bottom ash and evaporation treatment of all scrubber sludge to eliminate the most toxic metals and other pollutants.

1 Environmental Protection Agency, *Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Effluent Limitation Guidelines and Standards for the Steam Electric Power Generating Point Source Category* at 3-13, Table 3-2.

2 Environmental Protection Agency, Proposed Rule, Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards for the Steam Electric Power Generating Point Source Category, available at: http://water.epa.gov/scitech/wastetech/guide/steam-electric/upload/steam_prepub.pdf

3 <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/wastetech/guide/steam-electric/proposed.cfm>

4 Environmental Protection Agency, *Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Effluent Limitation Guidelines and Standards for the Steam Electric Power Generating Point Source Category* at 3-32.

5 <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/wastetech/guide/steam-electric/proposed.cfm>

6 Analysis of EPA data

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TO TAKE ACTION**
Winter - Spring 2015

► TAKE ACTION NOW:

The power plant industry has mounted a well-organized and well-financed campaign to pressure the Obama Administration to weaken this proposal. We need your help to ensure that EPA adopts the strongest pollution limits possible. Please write to President Obama today, and to learn more, please visit our website: www.cleanwateraction.org/power-plant-water-pollution



Sample Letter

Personalize for greater impact!

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Please make sure EPA finalizes a strong rule to protect our rivers, lakes and streams from toxic power plant water pollution.

Power plants need to be required to use the best available technology to reduce the most amount of pollution. Every year, these plants dump billions of pounds of arsenic, lead, mercury and selenium into U.S. surface waters and drinking water sources. It's time to end this reckless practice.

Strong standards to limit all power plant water pollution will improve the health of rivers and streams, making the water we drink and the fish we eat safer.

Most Respectfully,

Include your name, address and signature, and request a response.

Online: Take our Online Action at:

www.cleanwateraction.org/power-plant-water-pollution

or,

Call 202-456-1111, and ask President Obama to “make sure final limits on toxic water pollution from power plants are as strict as possible.”