August 11, 2025

Administrator Lee Zeldin
Environmental Protection Agency,
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC 20004
Washington, DC

Submitted to https://www.regulations.gov/document/EPA-HQ-OAR-2018-0794-6978

Dear Administrator Lee Zeldin,

Clean Air for the Long Haul Comments on Proposed Repeal of Amendments to National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants: Coal- and Oil-Fired Electric Utility Steam Generating Units (Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2018-0794)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following comments in reference to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed rule to repeal specific amendments to the National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants for Coal- and Oil-Fired Electric Utility Steam Generating Units (EGUs), otherwise known as the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS).

About the Clean Air for the Long Haul

Clean Air for the Long Haul ("the Cohort") is a nationwide coalition of environmental justice groups working collectively to advance environmental justice by seeking emissions reductions in the power and transportation industry sectors in the United States. Member organizations of the Cohort include: Alternatives for Community and Environment; Connecticut Coalition for Economic and Environmental Justice; Duwamish River Community Coalition; Green Door Initiative; New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance; South Bronx Unite; Texas Environmental

Justice Advocacy Services; West End Revitalization Association; WE ACT for Environmental Justice, and Wisconsin Green Muslims.

The Cohort creates and coordinates federal rulemaking campaigns, amplifies the voices and positions of overburdened communities, actively works to reduce and eliminate air pollution, and works to dismantle the legal and physical infrastructure that harm environmental justice communities. The Cohort also champions the urgent need for achieving emission reductions of toxic and greenhouse gases (GHGs), adopting and enforcing climate justice policies, and actively combatting inequitable siting and permitting practices that perpetuate irreparable harms on Black, Brown, Tribal, Indigenous, and low income communities in the United States.

This is why we are deeply concerned by the EPA's proposal to repeal the recently strengthened mercury and air toxics standards that provides overdue protections to our communities and the wider public against the adverse impacts of mercury, arsenic, and other toxic pollutants from power plants. Everyone deserves the right to clean air, water, and a healthy environment. It is the mission of the EPA to do just that, to safeguard the public and the environment. Yet, the proposal to roll back the 2024 MATS is an abandonment of the Agency's core responsibilities, puts the profits of polluting industry and billionaires over people, and moreover, threatens to dismantle the hard earned protections our communities have spent decades fighting for. We deserve better. **The EPA must retain or strengthen - not reverse - the standards to provide greater levels of health protections for our communities and the wider public.**

Disproportionate Impacts of Mercury and Hazardous Air Pollutants from Power Plants

Coal- and oil-fired power plants are the largest sources of mercury and air toxics, such as benzene, dioxins, heavy metals, among others. The science on the impacts of mercury and hazardous air pollutants is clear and settled. These harmful pollutants cause permanent harm to developing fetuses, birth defects and developmental delays in children[1]. Studies have shown mercury exposure for children leads to reduced neurological function which persists into adulthood and negatively impacts the rest of their lives[2]. For adults, cardiovascular disease in adults[3], skin irritation, lung disease, kidney damage, elevated risk of cancer, and premature deaths[4].

Mothers, unborn and young children as well as low-income, Indigenous, people of color who often live in close proximity to these plants and are particularly vulnerable to these adverse

[1] O'Connor, L. E., Spill, M. K., Trivedi, R., Saha, S., Thoerig, R. C., Foster, M., & Macfarlane, A. J. (2025). Mercury exposure and childhood outcomes: an overview of systematic reviews. *Environmental Research*, *274*, 121196.
[2] Zinia, S.S., Yang, KH., Lee, E.J. *et al.* Effects of heavy metal exposure during pregnancy on birth outcomes. *Sci Rep* 13, 18990 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-46271-0
[3] Genchi, G., Sinicropi, M. S., Carocci, A., Lauria, G., & Catalano, A. (2017). Mercury Exposure and Heart Diseases. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *14*(1), 74. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14010074
[4] Environmental Protection Agency. (2024). *Health Effects of Exposures to Mercury*. EPA. https://www.epa.gov/mercury/health-effects-exposures-mercury

impacts.[5] This is because of a legacy of structural racism leading to discriminatory housing practices and zoning. According to the EPA's own analysis, people living within 10 km of coal plants are far more likely to live at extreme levels of poverty while a higher percentage of the Native Americans than the national average live within 10 km of lignite plants.[6] Moreover, baseline ozone and PM2.5 exposure analyses show that Hispanics, Asians, American Indians may experience disproportionately higher ozone and PM2.5 exposures compared to the national average.[7] These communities are facing steeper impacts from mercury and other toxic pollution with fewer resources and worse healthcare. A rollback of the standard would only exacerbate these and other impacts from poverty and environmental injustice - deepening health disparities, increasing toxic exposure, and further burdening communities already struggling with limited resources and inadequate healthcare.

Retain and Strengthen the 2024 Amendments to the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards

The MATS have been effective in reducing hazardous air pollutants from power plants, including mercury pollution by 86% but it had not been updated in over a decade.[8] Over recent years, the Clean Air for the Long Haul advocated for the EPA to set the strongest mercury and air toxic standards for electric generating units and to deliver greater environmental benefits and improve the health for fenceline and environmental justice communities.[9] We were pleased to see stricter mercury standards for the largest offenders - lignite-burning power plants in the 2024 amendment to the MATS. Moreover, mandatory requirements for continuous emissions monitoring systems (CEMS) would enable better compliance and enforcement, and ensure reductions in emissions and disproportionate health impacts for communities near these fossil fuel plants.

The EPA projected that by 2035, the rule would result in nearly a 20% reduction in mercury annually. This decrease, along with reductions in other toxic pollution such as arsenic, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, lead, and selenium, would result in significant improvement in the public health outcomes for conditions such as infant mortality, heart attacks, asthma, lung cancer, and premature mortality. In 2035 alone, the health impacts from the current MATS will avoid up to 1,200 premature deaths, 870 hospital and emergency room visits, 1,900 cases of asthma onset, 360,000 cases of asthma symptoms, 48,000 missed school days, and 57,000

[5] Zhang CH, Sears L, Myers JV, Brock GN, Sears CG, Zierold KM. Proximity to coal-fired power plants and neurobehavioral symptoms in children. J Expo Sci Environ Epidemiol. 2022 Jan;32(1):124-134. doi: 10.1038/s41370-021-00369-7. Epub 2021 Jul 13. PMID: 34257388; PMCID: PMC8275639.
[6] EPA (2024). Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants: Coal- and Oil-Fired Electric Utility Steam Generating Units Review of the Residual Risk and Technology Review. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-04/2024-mats-rtr-final-ria-final.pdf
[7] Ibid.
[8] EPA (2025) Mercury and Air Toxics Standards https://www.epa.gov/stationary-sources-air-pollution/mercury-and-air-toxics-standards#additional-resources
[9] Clean Air for the Long Haul (2023). Clean Air for the Long Haul Letter to the EPA and the White House regarding Power and Vehicle Regulations, https://weact.org/updates/caflh-letter-to-epa-and-wh-regarding-power-and-vehicle-regulations/

lost workdays.[10,11] Repealing these critical updates forgoes the realization of the public health and environmental benefits that it could have delivered to people across the country, especially populations and communities most at risk - our mothers, children, Indigenous, low-income, and communities of color. It only deepens environmental injustices, exposing our communities to even greater risks of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

Moreover, coupled with other critical clean air regulations rollbacks and presidential exemptions for coal plants, this repeal undermines decades of progress in protecting vulnerable communities from toxic pollution and is a direct assault on public health and environmental justice. It means more mercury in our air, more asthma for our children, and more costs for families already struggling to breathe and make ends meet. These decisions benefit polluters, not people, and stall the clean energy transition that could bring jobs, savings, and healthier communities. Worse, limiting public comment periods silences the voices of those most impacted—undermining democratic participation and robbing frontline communities of their right to shape the policies that affect their lives. We must strengthen—not weaken—protections like MATS to ensure every person, regardless of zip code or income, has the right to clean air and a livable future.

Instead of rolling back these standards, the EPA must retain these protections, preserving stricter emissions standards for lignite-fired plants, CEMS, and not reinstating the low-emitting EGU program. This will safeguard public health, especially for vulnerable communities who contend with cumulative pollution burdens, ensure transparency and accountability, and consistent and uniform monitoring of hazardous air pollutants from across all EGUs. Moreover, EPA must go even further to strengthen the standards to ensure wider reaching public health benefits and protections for our communities and the general public.

One way to accomplish this is by setting the filterable particulate (non-mercury metals) emission standards to a more stringent 0.006 pounds per million British thermal units of heat input (lb/MMBtu) than the 0.010 lb/MMBtu that was finalized in 2024. The impacts of particulate matter are well documented. Exposure to particulate matter, especially the smallest and most deadly microscopic particles, PM2.5 or soot, cause a number of adverse health impacts. These include asthma[12, 13], lung disease[14], heart attacks and coronary heart disease[15], depression and

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[10] EPA (2024). Regulatory Impact Analysis for the Final National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants: Coal- and Oil-Fired Electric Utility Steam Generating Units Review of the Residual Risk and Technology Review. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-04/2024-mats-rtr-final-ria-final.pdf

[11] EPA (2024). Biden-Harris Administration Finalizes Suite of Standards to Reduce Pollution from Fossil Fuel-Fired Power Plants. https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-finalizes-suite-standards-reduce-pollution-fossil-fuel

[12] "The Links Between Air Pollution and Childhood Asthma." EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, 22 Oct. 2018, https://www.epa.gov/sciencematters/links-between-air-pollution-and-childhood-asthma.

[13] Tiotiu AI, Novakova P, Nedeva D, Chong-Neto HJ, Novakova S, Steiropoulos P, Kowal K. Impact of Air Pollution on Asthma Outcomes, Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2020 Aug 27;17(17):6212, doi: 10.3390/ijerph17176212.PMID: 32867076; PMCID: PMC7503605.

[14] Wang X, Chen L, Cai M, et al. (2023). Air pollution associated with incidence and progression trajectory of chronic lung diseases: a population-based cohort study, Thorax., doi:10.1136/thorax-2022-219489

[15] Stacey E. Alexeeff,; Kamala Deosaransingh; Stephen Van Den Eeden, et al (2023), Association of Long-term Exposure to Particulate Air Pollution With Cardiovascular Events in California, JAMA Netw

suicide[16,17], mental health issues, preterm births and emergency visits within a child's first year[18], and premature deaths[19], among others. Again, it is Indigenous, low-income and communities of color like those the members of the Clean Air for the Long Haul live, work, and advocate for who are unequally exposed at higher levels and adversely impacted by the health risks of particulate matter pollution.[20] Strengthening the standard to 0.006 lb/MMBtu will achieve greater health protections for communities that need and deserve them the most.

Conclusion

We urge the EPA to change course. The Agency must maintain and even strengthen the mercury and air toxics standards to reduce hazardous air pollutants from fossil-fuel power plants. This proposed rollback of this rule—alongside other critical regulations like the greenhouse gas standards for fossil-fuel power plants, vehicle emissions standards, and even threats to the Endangerment Finding—poses serious harm to environmental justice communities, who already face cumulative pollution burdens from multiple major sources. We will continue to hold the EPA accountable to its mission of protecting human health and the environment to keep our communities safe and preserve our future. Thank you for considering our input.

Respectfully submitted,

The Clean Air for the Long Haul

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[16] Liu, Q., Wang, W., Gu, X. et al. Association between particulate matter air pollution and risk of depression and suicide: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Environ Sci Pollut Res 28, 9029–9049 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-12357-3

[17] Qiu, X., Shi, L., Kubzansky, L. D., Wei, Y., Castro, E., Li, H., ... & Schwartz, J. D. (2023). Association of Long-term Exposure to Air Pollution With Late-Life Depression in Older Adults in the US. JAMA Network Open, 6(2), e2253668-e2253668 .

[18] Anaïs Teyton, et al, Exposure to Air Pollution and Emergency Department Visits During the First Year of Life Among Preterm and Full-term Infants, JAMA Netw Open. 2023;6(2):e230262. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.0262

[19] C. Arden Pope III, et al (2019) Mortality Risk and Fine Particulate Air Pollution in a Large, Representative Cohort of U.S. Adults, Environmental Health Perspectives, Vol. 127, No. 7, https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP4438

[20] Jbaily, A., Zhou, X., Liu, J. et al. Air pollution exposure disparities across US population and income groups. Nature 601, 228–233 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-04190-y