

## Report: Mercury emissions rise at coal-fired power plants

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Fish await a buyer at a Chinatown market in New York City in 2007. Fish have been one source of mercury scares in recent years, and some experts say the mercury may come from power-plant emissions. (Associated Press file photo )

WASHINGTON — Many coal-fired power plants lack widely available pollution controls for the highly toxic metal mercury, and mercury emissions recently increased at more than half of the country's 50 largest mercury-emitting power plants, according to a report released Wednesday.

Five of the 10 plants with the highest amount of mercury emitted are in Texas, according to the nonpartisan Environmental Integrity Project. Plants in Georgia, Missouri, Alabama, Pennsylvania and Michigan also are in the top 10.

The report, which used the most recent data available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, found that mercury emissions increased at 27 of the top 50 plants from 2007 to 2008. Overall, power-plant emissions of mercury decreased 4.7 percent in that period, but that amount was far less than what would be possible with available emissions controls, the report said.

No Colorado plants were among the top 50 cited.

Coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury pollution, generating more than 40 percent of U.S. emissions. Mercury in the air settles in rivers and lakes, where it moves through the food chain to fish that people eat.

Mercury exposure in fetuses can result in children born with learning disabilities. Each year, more than 300,000 babies may have an increased risk of such exposure, the report said.

"Even though the technology exists today to dramatically reduce the mercury pollution, the U.S. power industry has delayed cleanup and barely made a dent in the power-plant emissions," said Ilan Levin, an attorney with the Environmental Integrity Project.

"Delay by both the EPA and the electric-power industry is what has caused this," he said.

Mercury emissions in some states have declined as power plants have added pollution controls for sulfur dioxide and particulate matter that have a side benefit of reducing mercury as well. Some of the pollution controls were added as a result of settlements of lawsuits seeking enforcement of federal and state regulations.

Since 1990, the EPA has been required under the Clean Air Act to impose pollution controls on many forms of air pollution, including mercury. But there is still no national regulation to limit mercury pollution.

The EPA is working on a mercury-reduction rule and has agreed in a court settlement to complete it by November 2011.

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