

11-17-98

FACT SHEET

INFORMATION COLLECTION ON MERCURY EMISSIONS FROM ELECTRIC UTILITIES

TODAY'S ACTION

- ◆ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is today announcing its decision to require coal-fired electricity generating plants to submit information related to mercury emissions. Mercury is a toxic air pollutant that can bioaccumulate in the body and is known to cause damage to the nervous system. Mercury is also associated with serious neurological damage to the body.
- ◆ This action allows more comprehensive information from which mercury emissions can be derived to be collected from utilities. It requires coal-fired utilities to collect and report for one year data that will better characterize the extent of mercury emissions from various kinds of coal-fired plants. EPA will use the collected information to aid in the Agency's future decisions about the regulation of mercury emissions from these plants.
- ◆ The information collected by EPA on mercury emissions will be made available to the public. This will provide citizens with important information regarding plants in their communities.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS ACTION?

- ◆ Today's action will allow a more informed decision to be made regarding regulation of mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants.
- ◆ EPA will collect more accurate information than is currently available about the quantity and species of mercury being emitted from these plants. This will help the Agency and others to identify more effective mercury control technologies, as such technologies tend to be more effective if they are developed for a specific species of mercury.
- ◆ In addition to providing information to aid in the development of mercury control technologies, today's action will also provide a powerful incentive for the development of such mercury control technologies.

BACKGROUND

- ◆ Mercury emissions from coal-fired electricity generating plants are the largest source of mercury emissions in the United States, accounting for one-third of man-made mercury emissions to the air.

- ◆ In a February 1998 report to Congress on toxic air pollutants emitted from electricity generating plants, EPA identified mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants as the toxic air pollutant of greatest concern for public health from these sources. This utility air toxics report called for additional monitoring of mercury emissions from these plants to better ascertain the quantity and nature of those emissions so that a regulatory control strategy can be developed.
- ◆ EPA entered into a settlement agreement with the Natural Resources Defense Council on several issues surrounding EPA's utility air toxics report. As part of today's actions, EPA and the Natural Resources Defense Council are modifying the settlement agreement to extend the date by which EPA will make a regulatory determination on the control of mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants to December, 2000.
- ◆ EPA currently regulates the emissions of mercury from other sources, including medical waste incinerators and municipal waste combustors. There are currently no cost-effective control technologies to reduce mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants.
- ◆ Mercury emissions are transported through the air and deposited to water and land, and can bioaccumulate in fish and animal tissue in its most toxic form, methylmercury.
- ◆ Human exposure to mercury occurs primarily through eating contaminated fish. Exposure to high levels of mercury has been associated with serious neurological and developmental effects in humans.
- ◆ Depending on the dose, the health effects of mercury exposure can include subtle losses of sensory or cognitive ability, tremors, inability to walk, convulsions, and death. Because the developing fetus may be the most sensitive to the effects from methylmercury, women of child-bearing age are regarded as the population of greatest interest.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF THIS ACTION?

- ◆ Rather than requiring all plants to monitor their emissions, EPA has designed an information collection effort that will be considerably less burdensome to the industry while still providing the desired information.
- ◆ EPA is requiring each coal-fired electricity generating plant to conduct coal sampling analysis. The estimated average cost per facility per year for this sampling analysis is approximately \$17,500.
- ◆ EPA will also require a sample of approximately 75 to 100 plants, which will be randomly selected to include the major coal types and types of sulfur controls, to perform stack testing for quantity and species of mercury emissions once during the year. This stack test requirement is in

addition to the sampling analysis requirement. The average estimated cost of the stack test is \$44,500 per plant.

- ◆ The total annual cost of this information effort is \$16,800,000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- ◆ Interested parties can download the supporting statement from EPA's website at: <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/oarpg/t3pfpr.html>. For more information call Ellen Brown 202-260-7428. For technical information call Bill Maxwell at 919-541-5430 or e-mail him at maxwell.bill@epa.gov.
- ◆ EPA's Office of Air and Radiation's home page on the Internet contains a wide range of information on the air pollution programs including air toxics issues. The Office of Air and Radiation's home page address is: <http://www.epa.gov/oar/>.