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Blog/Mercury

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## **New Mercury and Air Toxics Standards Will Protect Children and Save Lives**

By [Fred Krupp](#) | [Bio](#) | Published: December 21, 2011

This is one of the best weeks I've had in a long time.

Right on the heels of [today's landmark court decision](#) upholding European laws to reduce airplane pollution, we got another [historic moment](#) for the environment and public health.

Today, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson unveiled the new [Mercury and Air Toxics Standards](#), which will place our country's first-ever national limits on mercury and other toxic air pollution from coal- and oil-fired power plants.

Every decade or so, the United States takes a giant step forward on the road to cleaner, healthier air. Getting the lead out of gasoline was one. Reducing acid rain was another.

Today's [Mercury and Air Toxics Standards](#), 21 years in the making, are a new giant step forward.

Power plants are responsible for half of all manmade mercury emissions, as well as 75 percent of acid gases, and 60 percent of arsenic.

Mercury exposure can cause brain damage in infants, and can affect children's ability to walk, talk, read and learn. Experts estimate that hundreds of thousands of babies are born each year with potentially unsafe levels of mercury in their blood.

Many of the other toxic pollutants also controlled by the new rules — such as chromium, arsenic, dioxin and acid gases — are known or probable carcinogens and can attack the brain, lungs, liver, and kidneys.

Cost-effective and tested technology solutions are available to reduce mercury pollution and other toxic air contaminants from power plants by more than 90 percent. Many states have already led the way in adopting policies to control mercury emissions, helping to drive investment in technology solutions, but this is the first time we'll have a national standard.

[According to EPA, the new rules will:](#)

- Prevent up to 11,000 premature deaths each year
- Prevent up to 4,700 heart attacks each year
- Prevent up to 130,000 asthma attacks each year
- Prevent up to 5,700 hospital and emergency room visits each year
- Prevent up to 540,000 missed work or school days each year

The rules will also provide employment for thousands. The updating of older power plants with modern air pollution control technology will support:

- 46,000 new short-term construction jobs
- 8,000 long-term utility jobs

The value of the air quality improvements for human health alone will be as much as \$90 billion each year.

I can't overstate the importance of these new standards. We should all thank President Obama, Administrator Jackson, and everyone at EPA for protecting our air – and our health.

This is the perfect holiday gift for America.