Environmental impacts of coal power: air pollution

Burning coal is a leading cause of smog, acid rain, global warming, and air toxics. In an average year, a typical coal plant generates:

- 3,700,000 tons of carbon dioxide (CO_2), the primary human cause of global warming--as much carbon dioxide as cutting down 161 million trees.
- 10,000 tons of sulfur dioxide (SO_2), which causes acid rain that damages forests, lakes, and buildings, and forms small airborne particles that can penetrate deep into lungs.
- 500 tons of small airborne particles, which can cause chronic bronchitis, aggravated asthma, and premature death, as well as haze obstructing visibility.
- 10,200 tons of nitrogen oxide (NO_x), as much as would be emitted by half a million late-model cars. NO_x leads to formation of ozone (smog) which inflames the lungs, burning through lung tissue making people more susceptible to respiratory illness.
- 720 tons of carbon monoxide (CO), which causes headaches and place additional stress on people with heart disease.
- 220 tons of hydrocarbons, volatile organic

compounds (VOC), which form ozone.

- 170 pounds of mercury, where just 1/70th of a teaspoon deposited on a 25-acre lake can make the fish unsafe to eat.

- 225 pounds of arsenic, which will cause cancer in one out of 100 people who drink water containing 50 parts per billion.

- 114 pounds of lead, 4 pounds of cadmium, other toxic heavy metals, and trace amounts of uranium.