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## Mercury Contamination: What it means for outdoor enthusiasts and the fish and wildlife they value

### Latest Developments

After 13 years, the Bush administration finally proposed national emissions standards to limit mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants, the largest remaining unregulated source. Unfortunately, their proposal falls short in cutting emissions to levels necessary to protect people and wildlife. It also fails to meet current law, which requires the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to set emissions standards that reflect what is achievable using the best modern technology. A detailed analysis of the proposal is available from NWF's website [www.nwf.org/cleantherain](http://www.nwf.org/cleantherain).

EPA is accepting public comments on its proposal through April 30, 2004. The agency is under a court-approved settlement agreement to finalize its mercury rule by December 15, 2004.



### Mercury pollution in the U.S.: What's at stake?

#### Mercury is toxic and requires the strongest regulations.

The nation's 430 coal-fired power plants are the largest source of mercury pollution in the U.S. Each year they emit about 48 tons of mercury, accounting for 42 percent of emissions nationwide. Once released from smokestacks, mercury falls into lakes and streams, accumulating in fish tissue and posing a threat to people and wildlife who eat fish. In 2002, health departments in 43 states issued advisories warning the public to limit or avoid entirely their consumption of locally-caught fish due to mercury.



#### Mercury pollution threatens recreational fishing.

The Bush administration is attempting to weaken and postpone mercury regulations at a time when at least 43 states have local or statewide advisories against eating certain fish because of high mercury levels. Fourteen states warn the public to restrict their consumption of fish in every lake and stream in the state because of mercury contamination.

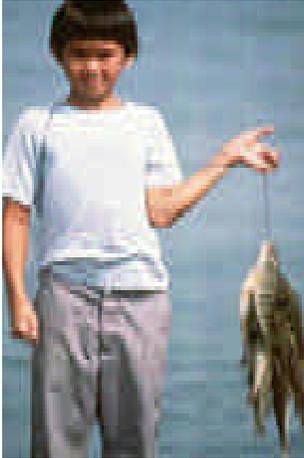
#### Mercury contamination harms wildlife.

Mercury's effects on fish and wildlife have been monitored extensively. Here are a few examples of how contamination impacts wildlife across the U.S.

- ▶ In fish, mercury contamination has been linked to reduced hatching success and impaired growth and development.
- ▶ Increased mercury levels affect reproduction, growth and behavior in small mammals such as river otters and mink.
- ▶ Mercury harms the nervous system and reproductive health of large mammals such as whales, seals, raccoons, the Florida panther, and the American alligator.
- ▶ In fish-eating birds like starlings, mallard ducks, red-tailed hawks and loons, mercury contamination can result in weight loss, difficulty in flying, reduced hatching success, and reduced clutch size.
- ▶ Increased mercury levels are linked with infertility, reduced hatching success, and behavioral abnormalities in shorebirds like black skimmer, egrets, and Forster's tern.



## Mercury poses a serious health risk



### Mercury poisoning can permanently harm an unborn baby or young child

Mercury in pregnant women can disrupt brain development in their babies. Among the harmful health effects from mercury poisoning are delays in walking, talking, and developing fine motor skills, attention deficit, poor memory, and an inability to process and recall information.

### One in 6 women of childbearing age has blood mercury levels exceeding what EPA considers safe for a developing baby.

According to EPA's latest analysis, more than 600,000 babies are born each year at risk of mercury-related learning and developmental problems. This figure doubles earlier estimates. In addition, the National Academy of Sciences in 2000 concluded that as many as 60,000 babies may be born each year in the U.S. with neurological problems that could lead to poor school performance because of exposure to methylmercury in utero.

## What's wrong with the Bush administration's proposed mercury rule?

### Power plants are getting a special deal under the Administration's proposal.

Power plants are the single largest source of mercury pollution, contributing 42 percent of all mercury emissions in the United States. Yet, they are the only major source not regulated. The next largest sources, municipal and medical waste incinerators, have been subject to MACT regulations since 2001, and have reduced their mercury emissions

by 90-94 percent.

### The administration's mercury proposal falls far short of what is possible and necessary to protect public health.

The EPA is required to set emission limits that represent what is achievable using the best modern technology. Its current proposal does not do that and, in fact, proposes emission limits that are

in some cases more than 10 times higher than what is being emitted today by modern coal plants.

### Emissions trading will not protect people and wildlife that live near the source.

Under a cap-and-trade proposal, some power plants will clean up their act, but others will continue to pollute, and could even increase the amount mercury they release. People and wildlife living near these polluters will have no protection.

## More Should Be Done to Reduce Mercury from Power Plants

### As sportsmen lose the resource, families lose a pastime, and states lose a livelihood.

According to the American Sportfishing Association, fishing ranks among the top family leisure-time activities. An estimated 44 million people who fish in the U.S. generate nearly \$42 billion in retail sales *each year*. Nearly 9 million women and more than 10 million kids under the age of 16 go fishing. More people fished last year than played golf and tennis combined.

### The technology exists today to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent or more.

Some current technology used to control pollutants like sulfur dioxide and particulates is very effective in capturing mercury emissions. Controls on the order of 70-90 percent can be realized through the use of either current technologies or new mercury-specific technologies, at plants burning all types of coal. These technologies are being installed by power plants that are meeting new state-specific mercury control requirements, and have been in place at some other plants for years to control other pollutants.

### Reducing mercury emissions lowers mercury levels in fish.

Recent research completed in Florida, Wisconsin, and New Hampshire prove that if emissions decrease, so do mercury deposition levels and corresponding levels in fish and wildlife. Mercury-polluted lakes and streams are recovering at a much greater rate than initially believed—now a matter of years, not decades. Another study finds that mercury emitted today is making its way faster into the food chain than mercury emitted even six months earlier, suggesting that new mercury has an immediate impact on local fish populations.

For more information go to [www.nwf.org/cleantherain](http://www.nwf.org/cleantherain) or call us at 202-797-6692