WHAT'S WRONG WITH COAL PLANTS?

WHAT TO KNOW TO KEEP OUR FAMILIES SAFE

Coal-fired power plants are an enormous source of toxic pollution. They spew mercury and 80 other dangerous air pollutants, from arsenic to acid gases to the carbon dioxide that is warming our planet. When coal is burned, it creates coal ash or coal combustion residuals (CCRs), a mix of pollutants including mercury, lead, oxides, particulate matter, and various other heavy metals. These pollute the air and contaminate groundwater.

Coal plants in the US

Levels of pollutants are highest in areas closest to the facilities, but mercury and other unsafe pollutants can travel far and wide.

Coal-fired power plants are on the decline in the United States because of cheaper and cleaner alternatives, including renewable energy resources.

The last new large coal plant was built in Texas in 2013. Still, as of 2022, over 200 remain, many old, costly, and inefficient. While around a quarter of these, spanning 25 states, have plans to close by the end of 2029, it remains to be seen when we'll get to zero in operation.

What are the health impacts of coal-fired plants?

Air pollution from coal-fired power plants is linked to a number of health dangers including asthma, cancer, heart and lung ailments, neurological problems, dementia, and developmental and cognitive delays.

Sulfur dioxide and nitrogen emissions from coal-fired power plants create ground-level ozone, which can cause respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

Soot disproportionately affects children and other vulnerable populations. In kids, respiratory issues have been linked to exposure in utero. Coal plant particulate matter triggers asthma attacks by irritating airways and causing breathing problems. Air pollutants can bring on infections, which can trigger asthma attacks.

Mercury, one of the most toxic poisons known to science, can impact children's ability to walk, talk, read, and learn. No amount of mercury is safe for the developing brain.

Coal miners are more exposed to coal dust than the general population. Their occupational exposure can result in higher incidences of pneumoconiosis (black lung disease), silicosis, and cancer. These diseases can develop over time, and their severity may differ based on exposure levels and other environmental factors.

MOMS *clean air* FORCE

The mission of Moms Clean Air Force is to protect children from air pollution and climate change. We envision a safe, stable, and equitable future where all children breathe clean air. We fight for Justice in Every Breath, recognizing the importance of equitable solutions in addressing air pollution and climate change. www.momscleanairforce.org

How can we prevent health issues from coal plants?

Transitioning away from coal-fired power plants to cleaner energy sources is a cure for these health issues; research has shown a drop in asthma rates in areas where coal-fired power plants were closed.

What is the climate impact of coal plants?

Coal is mostly carbon, and when burned, it creates more carbon dioxide—a potent greenhouse gas—than other fossil fuels like oil and natural gas.

Get involved

Clean air is critical for human health. Mercury and other pollutants emitted by coal-fired power plants are poisonous. Transitioning away from coal-fired power plants to cleaner energy sources for good will help clean up our air—and decrease the diseases associated with burning coal.

There are seriously polluting coal plants still in operation in Iowa, and you can get involved in the fight to decommission them. Today, clean energy from solar panels and wind turbines is cheaper and more reliable than energy from fossil fuels, and those technologies save thousands of lives every year.

For sources, please visit: **www.momscleanairforce.org/sources-coal-plants** or email **karin@momscleanairforce.org**.

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What are environmental justice concerns around coal plants?

The majority of the top mercury-emitting coal-fired plants are located within 50 to 100 miles of large population centers, some in areas with poor air quality.

Black, Brown, low-income, and Indigenous populations bear a disproportionate burden of environmental harms and adverse health impacts. An outsize number of Black people in the United States live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant.

In addition to living closest to smokestacks, some communities are at higher risk for ingesting mercury as they typically eat more fish than others. Native Americans are among the highest risk groups for mercury contamination owing to traditional heavy fish consumption.

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