



## Legislation Text

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In 2011, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS), with the intention to limit the release of mercury and other hazardous pollution created as a bi-product of coal- and oil-burning power plants. Power plants are responsible for 50 percent of mercury emissions, more than 50 percent of acid gas emissions, and 25 percent of toxic metal emissions in the United States. Coal-fired power plants emit 99 percent of mercury emissions in the United States each year.

The new standards impacted approximately 44 percent of existing coal-fired power plants, requiring the installation of advanced pollution control equipment. This equipment would reduce mercury emissions by 91 percent. This reduction in mercury emissions results in 4,500 fewer cases of chronic bronchitis, 11,000 fewer cases of acute bronchitis, 220,000 fewer cases of respiratory symptoms, and the saving of 17,000 lives per year. The economic impact is remarkable: 850,000 fewer missed work days, and \$37 billion and \$90 billion in benefits from improved national health. This was in further consideration of an estimated annual cost of \$9.6 billion. Between 2011 and 2017, Ohio - one of the 7 highest-polluting states in the nation - reduced mercury emissions by more than 85% and by more than 2,000 pounds.

In December of 2018, the EPA proposed a revision to the existing MATS that substantially reduces the estimated benefit relative to the cost. The proposal reduced the estimated annual savings from at least \$59 billion to just \$6 million, potentially moving to undermine the economic efficiency of the MATS regulations. Furthermore, the EPA is soliciting comment on its authority to rescind the MATS altogether. The comment period closes on April 8, 2019.

To urge that Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, under the administration of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, be maintained at their current levels.

**WHEREAS**, mercury is a highly potent neurotoxin that is most commonly dispersed into the air when burned by coal- and oil-fired power plants; and

**WHEREAS**, once in the atmosphere, mercury can travel for extended periods of time before being deposited in water through precipitation, where microorganisms convert it into its most toxic form, methylmercury which can affect fetal and childhood neurological development, increase risk of heart attacks and diabetes, as well as weaken immune functioning; and

**WHEREAS**, the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) were established in 2011 and were the first set of federal rules to limit hazardous chemicals, such as mercury, from coal-burning and oil-burning power plants; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2011, the EPA estimated that MATS would bring between \$37 billion and \$90 billion in annual benefits and cost about \$9.6 billion to the industry; and

**WHEREAS**, the Center for American Progress found that MATS reduced mercury emissions from power plants by 81 percent since going into effect; and

**WHEREAS**, according to EPA projections, MATS save over 17,000 lives per year in the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, since the implementation of MATS, seven of the highest-polluting states successfully reduced mercury emissions by more than 2,000 pounds; and

**WHEREAS**, on December 27, 2018, the EPA issued a proposed revised Supplemental Cost Finding for the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards; and

**WHEREAS**, in its 2018 assessment, the EPA found that costs for the MATS program would range from \$7.4 to \$9.6 billion annually and the benefits would range from \$4 to \$6 million annually. The EPA found the benefits to be significantly less than the billions of dollars of benefits that were estimated in 2011 because the 2018 report did not include health benefits of limiting toxic chemical pollution in addition to reducing the toxic chemicals themselves; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Columbus, its residents and its environment will be well served by maintaining and strengthening the MATS; now, therefore,

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBUS:**

That we hereby urge the United States Environmental Protection Agency to maintain Federal Mercury and Air Toxics Standards and the regulation of coal- and oil-burning power plants as currently set forth in the Clean Air Act.