

EPA COAL PLANT WATER POLLUTION STANDARDS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

TOXIC METALS IN OUR WATER

Every year, coal-fired power plants dump millions of tons of toxic metals into our waterways. In fact, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, **more than half of all toxic water pollution in the country comes from coal-fired power plants**, making coal plants the number one source of toxic water pollution in the U.S.¹ What's more, nearly 4 out of 5 coal plants in the U.S. have no limits on the amount of toxics they are allowed to dump into our water.²

Coal plants across the country are disposing of toxic heavy metals like arsenic, selenium, boron, cadmium, mercury, and lead in our waterways, polluting our drinking water, fishing areas, and local rivers and streams. Research has shown that exposure to these dangerous chemicals can lead to birth defects, cancer, and even death—meaning that limiting these pollutants will not only clean up our water, but will also save lives.

The existing standards governing water pollution from power plants have not been updated in more than 30 years. The Environmental Protection Agency has repeatedly acknowledged that the existing guidelines have not kept pace with developments in the industry and the current standards fail to address the worst pollutants that are dumped into our water.

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But good news is on the way. This spring, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed new coal plant water pollution standards to limit the amount of toxic metals that can be dumped in the water. These water pollution limits—also referred to as Effluent Limitation Guidelines—will, if finalized in their strongest form, eliminate or greatly reduce toxic

dumping in our nation's waterways that limit the amount of toxic metals that is dumped in our waterways. These standards will also require all coal plants to monitor and report the amount of pollution dumped into the water, giving us detailed information about the types and amounts of dangerous chemicals in our water.

The Environmental Protection Agency's strongest proposed approach is common-sense, affordable, and is already being used by some coal plants. **Limiting the amount of toxics in our water will save lives, prevent children from getting sick, and ensure our water is safe to drink and our fish safe to eat.**

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Toxic coal water pollution is a national problem, and South Carolina is no exception. Although our state has twelve active coal power plants, only three of them have permits which limit dumping of any toxic metal, and these three plants only limit arsenic, mercury, and selenium. At least eleven of these plants have discharges contaminated by metal-laden coal ash or dangerous smokestack scrubber sludge. Worse, only three of these plants report how much arsenic and selenium they are discharging in the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory. The plants that do report alone discharged over 3,500 pounds of arsenic and selenium in one year, according to the Inventory. All that pollution has serious consequences. At least one plant is dumping its wastes into a water body which has been formally designated as having impaired water quality, the Waccamaw River.³

Visit action.sierraclub.org/wastewater to learn more, get involved and take action in support of these critical new standards.

¹ http://water.epa.gov/scitech/wastetech/guide/steam-electric/upload/proposed_factsheet.pdf

² Analysis of EPA data

³ Data on permit limits and discharges is drawn from EPA's ECHO database and other permitting documents. Plants which have retired, or which will shortly retire, are not included in these figures.