

Pennsylvania to issue new mercury limits

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The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection reportedly plans to order a substantial cut in toxic mercury emissions from coal-burning plants.

The new regulation would make Pennsylvania the fifth state -- and one the first major coal-producing states -- to order mercury emissions reductions stricter than those set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported Wednesday.

The Pennsylvania plan would require coal-fired plants to reduce mercury emissions by 80 percent within four years and 90 percent by 2015. The U.S. EPA wants a 70 percent cap on emissions by 2018, although full compliance is not expected until years later, the newspaper said.

"The federal rule is woefully inadequate in protecting public health," DEP Secretary Kathleen McGinty told the Inquirer.

Pennsylvania's 36 coal-fired power plants produce most of the state's 5.7 tons of mercury emitted each year, placing the state second, behind Texas, in the amount of mercury emissions.

Mercury occurs naturally in coal and is released into the atmosphere when the coal is burned. As the mercury particles fall into water, they are converted into a more toxic form and then enter the food chain through freshwater fish.

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