

Emissions plan sparks EPA internal fight

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regional officials are protesting a planned revision of airborne toxic emission rules for industrial plants.

The proposal, which some regional officials say would be "detrimental to the environment," was made public Monday by the advocacy group Natural Resources Defense Council, The Washington Post reported. The NRDC said the proposal would change emissions standards for oil refineries, hazardous waste incinerators, chemical plants, steel mills and other facilities that discharge thousands of pounds of airborne toxins such as arsenic, mercury and lead.

Under current law, plants emitting 10 tons or more of a toxin within a year, or 25 tons or more of a combination of toxins, must install "maximum achievable control technology" to reduce the emissions by at least 95 percent. The proposal lifts that requirement for polluters reducing their emissions to below 25 tons a year, The Post said, potentially allowing emissions to increase as long as they remained under the 25-ton limit.

An internal memo from eight of the EPA's 10 regional offices said the change might result in increased toxic emissions. Seven offices said the proposal would allow polluters to "virtually avoid regulation," the newspaper reported.

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