

EPA requires cleanup of mercury from cement plants

August 10 2010, By Renee Schoof, McClatchy Newspapers

The Environmental Protection Agency on Monday announced the nation's first limits on mercury emissions from cement plants. The decision also will require reductions of other harmful pollutants from cement plants, including soot, also known as particle pollution, which is linked to asthma, heart attacks and premature deaths for people with heart and lung diseases.

The rules are part of a broader EPA air-cleanup plan. Next year the agency will put the first nationwide controls on [mercury](#) and other hazardous air pollutants from a much larger source, coal-fired power plants. The federal government presently doesn't require power plants to control mercury and other toxics.

Coal-fired power plants are the source of 51 percent of the manmade mercury emissions in the U.S, followed by industrial and other boilers, at 15 percent. Cement kilns are third, with 7 percent, according to the EPA.

Mercury in air pollution falls into water, where it builds up in fish and shellfish. Mercury can damage the developing brains of fetuses and children. In adults, excessive exposure can increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart attacks and cause other physical damage.

The EPA has found mercury in fish in lakes in all 50 states; in 49 percent of those lakes, the mercury concentrations were higher than the EPA's recommended levels.

The new rules on cement plants will reduce their [mercury emissions](#) by 92 percent when they go into full effect in 2013. The soot reductions also are expected to be large: The EPA says that [particle pollution](#) will be reduced by 92 percent, and sulfur dioxide, which reacts with other compounds in the atmosphere to create tiny particles that can harm the lungs, will be reduced by 78 percent.

The EPA estimated that the rules for mercury and other pollutants will cost the cement industry an estimated \$350 million to \$950 million per year. It said the health and environmental benefits would be much greater, about \$7 to \$19 in benefits for every dollar spent on pollution controls.

Patti Flesher, a spokeswoman for the Portland Cement Association, said that some of the 100 cement plants nationwide wouldn't be able to meet the new standards and would have to close.

The industry group said in a statement that it estimated that the pollution control equipment needed to meet the new standards would cost its members several billion dollars. It also warned that the U.S. might then import more cement from countries that continue to allow mercury and other emissions.

In a letter to the EPA last week, the cement lobby asked for a delay of the new rule. It said it wouldn't be able to pass the costs on to consumers and that therefore up to 30 plants might have to close.

The rule also will require steep reductions in hydrocarbons and toxic gases from cement plants.

Andy O'Hare, the industry group's vice president for regulatory affairs, said those reductions would require plants to add wet scrubbers, which use large amounts of water, a problem in arid areas of the West.

The industry group lobbied heavily against the new rules. Records show that it spent \$910,000 over the past year to hire lobbyists from the firm of Bracewell and Giuliani, including Jeff Holmstead, a former EPA assistant administrator in charge of air rules during the administration of President George W. Bush.

"We encourage the cement industry to spend more money on cleanup _ and less on lobbying," said Frank O'Donnell, the president of the advocacy group Clean Air Watch.

"We are still going through all the details, but generally this is an extremely positive step towards cleaner air, taken despite scare-mongering by the cement lobby," he said Monday in an e-mail.

(c) 2010, McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Visit the McClatchy Washington Bureau on the World Wide Web at www.mcclatchydc.com.

Citation: EPA requires cleanup of mercury from cement plants (2010, August 10) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-08-epa-requires-cleanup-mercury-cement.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--