

Airborne toxins down, but overall pollutant levels rising, EPA says

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Better technologies may bring cleaner air, but dumping of toxins onto land is rising, agency says.

(HealthDay)—There's some good news and bad news from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on pollutants: Although emissions of toxic air pollutants in the United States continue to decline, total releases of toxic chemicals in the air, water and land are on the rise.

The findings come from the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI), the EPA's annual report on pollutants.

"Since 1998, we have recorded a steady decline in the amount of TRI chemicals released into the air and, since 2009 alone, we have seen more than a 100 million pound decrease in TRI [air pollutants](#) entering our communities," EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said in an agency news release. "This remarkable success is due in part to the TRI program and concerted efforts by industry, regulators and public interest groups to clean up the air we all depend upon."

Total toxic air releases declined 8 percent from 2010 to 2011, the EPA said in the report, mostly due to decreases in emissions of hazardous air pollutants such as mercury and hydrochloric acid.

Likely reasons for the decrease in these emissions include installation of new pollution-control technologies at [coal-fired power plants](#) and a switch to other fuel sources, according to the report.

Releases of toxic chemicals into surface water fell 3 percent from 2010 to 2011.

Releases of toxins on land, however, jumped by 19 percent, primarily due to increases in land disposal at metal mines, the EPA said.

In 2011, a total of 4 billion pounds of toxic chemicals were disposed of or released into the air, water or land—an 8 percent increase from 2010. It was the second year in a row that there was an increase in total releases of [toxic chemicals](#).

The EPA's report gathers data on certain toxic chemical releases to the [air](#), water and land, as well as information about waste-management and pollution-prevention activities at manufacturing, metal mining, electric utility and commercial hazardous waste facilities across the country.

More information: The Natural Resources Defense Council has more about [health and the environment](#).

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