



MERCURY PROTECTIONS AND THE CLEAN AIR ACT ARE UNDER ATTACK

Former coal lobbyist and acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler's effort to roll back the foundation for the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) is more than an abhorrent policy decision to privilege polluter profits over the health of pregnant women, young children, and the elderly—it's part of a methodical scheme to undermine the Clean Air Act itself.

The MATS protect the public from mercury, arsenic, hydrochloric acid, and a variety of other air pollutants, which are especially harmful to vulnerable populations like infants and mothers. The EPA estimates that the MATS protections prevent up to 11,000 premature deaths and more than 100,000 asthma attacks and heart attacks each year. It also provides massive benefits—such as protecting children from lifelong neurological damage—that the EPA has yet to fully quantify.

After these lifesaving protections were finalized, almost every electric utility in the U.S. installed pollution control equipment to comply with the new standards. As a result, mercury pollution from power plants has dropped precipitously. Representatives for the [electric utility industry](#) have asked EPA to keep the standards in place—mainly because utilities have already made the financial investments to comply.

Despite these pleas, however, Andrew Wheeler and his air policy chief, Bill Wehrum, both of whom are long-term representatives of industrial polluters, are now planning to adjust EPA's analysis of the MATS to make it easier for a handful of [coal executives that supported Trump's Presidential bid](#) to attack it in court. Wheeler and

Wehrum's analysis would ignore the public health benefits of MATS, making it far less sound than EPA's prior analysis that included them, and allow coal-industry lawyers to argue that the MATS should be wholly eliminated.

The new analysis would also decisively tilt EPA's cost-benefit analyses in favor of polluters, and against public health—potentially altering EPA's administration of many other Clean Air Act provisions. But any cost benefit analysis that ignores the benefits of keeping toxic pollution away from our families is deeply flawed—that's why public health officials, environmentalists, and community activists immediately condemned the move as one that could threaten the health gains achieved through the MATS and the Clean Air Act more broadly.

Any sensible person would recognize these basic protections for pregnant women and young children are already working, and that undermining them is a direct attack on their health and development. But Wheeler and Wehrum are putting the interests of their former employers before logic and before the health of American children. They are trying to permanently weaken the EPA's ability to protect the public so that polluters can make more money. It's shameful, and we must stop them.

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