

FACT SHEET



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CLEANING THE AIR

The League has been a champion for clean air for decades, recognizing the vital link between air quality, human health, and the natural environment. Much of our work has focused on cleaning up coal-fired power plants—a major source of air pollutants that contribute to smog, acid rain, mercury pollution, and global warming.

MERCURY

Mercury is a naturally occurring but toxic element that is found in coal. Coal-fired electric power plants are the largest uncontrolled source of mercury in the United States. When coal is burned to produce electricity, the mercury in the coal is emitted from the smokestacks of the power plant. Once released, much of the airborne mercury settles in our waterways, where it is taken up by aquatic life and travels up the food chain, accumulating in large fish species such as walleye, bass, northern pike, muskellunge, tuna, and bluefish. If consumed by people, mercury interferes with the development of the nervous system, especially during prenatal development and early childhood. As a result, many states have issued advisories recommending limits on the amount of fish that can be safely eaten.

For over a decade, the League has worked hard to reduce the mercury coming from coal-fired power plants. In Minnesota, the League was instrumental in passing landmark legislation requiring the largest power plants to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent—a model that has been used throughout the region. We also brought anglers and environmental advocates together to push the federal government to more aggressively regulate mercury. Through public testimony, congressional meetings, letter writing campaigns, and even litigation, the League has played a lead role in this ongoing campaign to secure strong federal regulations.

OTHER POLLUTANTS

In addition to mercury, coal-fired power plants release enormous amounts of sulfur, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide, which cause smog, acid rain, and global warming. Many of the nation's power plants are decades old and emit much more pollution than newer plants. As we've worked to clean up these oldest, dirtiest power plants, the League has pressed for national and state policies requiring electric companies to meet modern pollution control standards.

We also pushed for a law in Minnesota that gives incentives to utilities to voluntarily reduce air pollution from power plants. Thanks to these policies, two old polluting power plants were converted from coal to cleaner burning natural gas, and modern pollution control equipment has been installed on four other power plants—reducing sulfur, nitrogen, and mercury emissions in the state by more than 90 percent.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR ENERGY PROGRAM

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