

Coal and Oil Power Plants Top North American Polluter List

MONTREAL, Canada, June 3, 2004 (ENS) - Coal and oil fired power plants are the leading industrial source of air pollution in North America, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) announced on Wednesday.

These power plants accounted for nearly half of all industrial air emissions released in Canada and the United States in 2001, according to the tri-national organization's annual survey of chemical pollution from industrial facilities.

Forty-six of the top 50 air polluters in North America were coal or oil-fired power plants - the sector as a whole produced 45 percent of the 755,502 tons of toxic air releases in 2001.

Hydrochloric and sulfuric acids were the chemicals most commonly released from the burning of coal and oil at electric utilities, the CEC reports.

These power plants also accounted for 64 percent of all mercury air emissions, mainly from coal combustion.

The survey finds that overall industrial air emissions in decreased by 18 percent from 1998 to 2001, but the decrease for coal and oil-fired power plants was half the rate of other sectors over the same time period.

Air releases, including smokestack emissions, continued to account for almost two-thirds of the chemicals released by companies on-site.



Despite pollution concerns, high natural gas prices have prompted renewed calls for additional coal-fired capacity

<< photo courtesy of NASA >>



Coal-fired power plant in Ohio
<< photo courtesy of Ohio EPA >>

"We are still pumping more chemicals into the air than all other methods of release combined," said William Kennedy, executive director of the CEC. "We have shown that it is possible to reduce pollution, but cleaner air requires industry, government and the public to work together for cleaner fuels, conservation and more renewable energy."

Headquartered in Montreal, the CEC was established in 1994 by Canada, Mexico and the United States as a complement to the North American Free Trade Agreement and as a vehicle to address regional environmental concerns.

The report "Taking Stock 2001" is the eighth annual survey by the organization on chemical pollution from Canadian and U.S. industrial facilities, including chemical and plastics manufacturers, steel mills, paper mills, coal and oil-fired power plants, and hazardous waste management facilities.

Mexico does not yet require reporting and is not included in the report. The Mexican government is expected to announce a mandatory and publicly accessible pollutant release and transfer registry in the near future.

The new CEC report compares data submitted to the Canadian and United States federal governments by 21,254 facilities, which monitor their releases of poisonous chemicals, including carcinogens and neurotoxicants to the air, land and water.

The CEC analyzed 204 chemicals common to both the Canadian and U.S. reporting systems and found 1.4 million tons of these chemicals were released into the environment in 2001.

Another 1.5 million tons were transferred to recycling, energy recovery and treatment facilities.

Total releases and transfers declined some 10 percent between 1998 and 2001, the CEC reported, although off-site releases rose three percent.

Five U.S. states - Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Indiana - along with the Canadian province of Ontario accounted for some 40 percent of all releases and transfers of chemicals in North America in 2001 and more than one-third of all released on-site and off-site.

Facilities in Texas released the largest amount of chemicals on-site - Ohio weighed in with largest total releases, mostly from electric utilities.

In the United States, three coal-fired power plants reported the largest toxic air releases in 2001:

- CP&L Roxboro Steam Electric Plant in Semora, North Carolina. The four-unit, 2,462 megawatt facility is one of the largest power plants in the United States.
- Reliant Energy's Keystone Power Plant in Shelocta, Pennsylvania
- Georgia Power Bowen Steam Electric Generating Plant in Cartersville, Georgia

These three plants each reported more than 7,400 tons of toxic air releases and were responsible for more than seven percent of the U.S. total.

Reliant also recorded the largest on-site air emissions of mercury of any power plant in the report - some 819 kilograms or 1,800 pounds.

Although total North American air emissions decreased 18 percent from 1998 to 2001, Canadian emissions rose three percent.

In Canada, a single facility was responsible for eight percent of all toxic air emissions - Ontario Power Generation's Nanticoke Generation Station. The largest power station of its kind in North America, Nanticoke's eight 500 megawatt generators produce a total of 4,000 megawatts of power at this 30 year old facility.

The Nanticoke plant was also responsible for the second largest on-site air releases of mercury - some 226 kilograms (497 pounds) - by a Canadian electrical facility, following Alberta's TransAlta Corporation's Sundance Thermal Generating Plant at 270 kilograms (594 pounds).



Ontario Power Generation's coal-fired thermal generating station in Nanticoke, Ontario

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