



# EPA to roll back mercury rule in a boon to coal industry and blow to human health

Another Obama-era regulation takes a severe hit.

E.A. CRUNDEN 

OCT 1, 2018, 12:03 PM



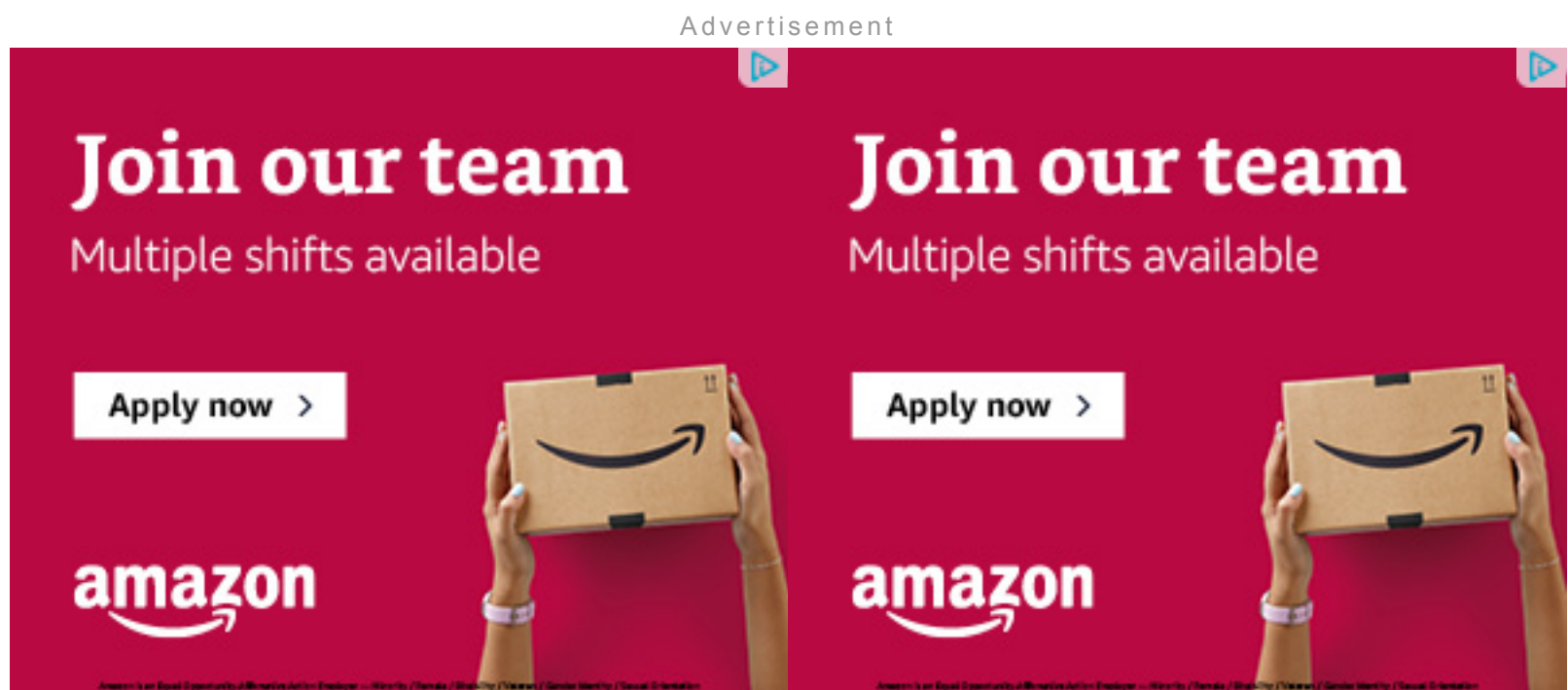
THE LONGVIEW POWER PLANT, A COAL-FIRED PLANT, STANDS ON AUGUST 21, 2018 IN MAIDSVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA. CREDIT: SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

The Trump administration is preparing to weaken a major environmental regulation targeting the toxic chemical mercury. The proposed change will heavily weigh costs to the industries the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is meant to regulate while largely ignoring dangers to human health.

A proposal from the EPA expected to head to the White House in coming days would greatly reduce current mercury regulations in a boon to coal-burning power plants.

Two senior officials told the Washington Post that the new proposed rule would target the Obama administration's 2011 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS), which limits mercury emissions from power plants.

Some limits on mercury emissions would still exist but public health data would no longer be a core consideration. Meanwhile the costs to industry would be taken into account, in a severe blow to the Obama-era regulations.



The rollback comes following years of lobbying from the coal industry. The

Trump administration has declined to discuss the rule's specifics but officials are touting the rollback as a victory for U.S. coal.

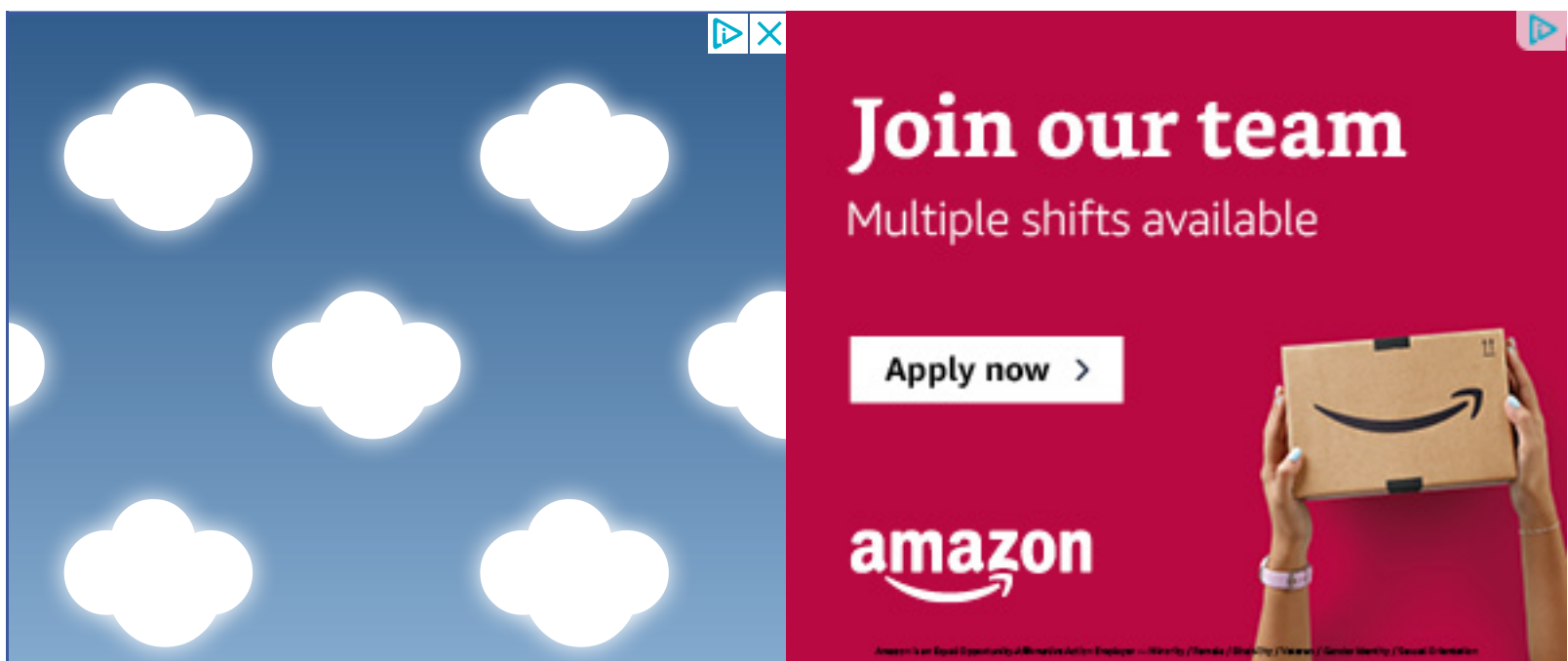
"The MATS Rule was an egregious example of the Obama administration's indifference toward required cost benefit analysis," said EPA spokesperson John Konkus in a statement on Sunday. "EPA knows these issues are of importance to the regulated community and the public at large and is committed to a thoughtful and transparent regulatory process in addressing them."



**New Trump Supreme Court pick gives environmental groups a lot to fear as consensus strategy emerges**

Current rules require the EPA to weigh the health benefits associated with reducing pollutants like mercury, something that has factored heavily into the agency's limitations on coal plants.

Exposure to mercury can cause brain damage, along with damage to the nervous system and to both fetal and child development. It took decades and millions of dollars for the EPA to develop the 2011 standards, despite receiving congressional approval to regulate toxic metals associated with coal-burning in the 1990s.



The EPA estimated at the time of its release that the Obama-era rule would cost the coal industry some \$9.6 billion in compliance fees. However, the agency also emphasized that up to 11,000 premature deaths could be prevented and that \$37 billion to \$90 billion in health and work costs could be saved as a result of the measure. The EPA said some 540,000 missed work or sick days would also be avoided.

Ongoing litigation has seen numerous legal challenges mounted against the rule since 2012, when the standards were allowed to take effect. In 2014, Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh — President Donald Trump’s current Supreme Court nominee — notably argued in a dissent from his D.C. Circuit colleagues that it was “unreasonable” for the EPA not to consider the economic cost of the regulation.

The Trump administration has similarly argued that line, which is in keeping with the stance of the wider coal industry.

Robert E. Murray, who heads Murray Energy Corp., requested a rollback of the mercury regulations in a “wish list” given to Energy Secretary Rick Perry

following Trump's election.

Acting EPA head Andrew Wheeler previously worked for Murray as a lobbyist and the coal baron himself is a prominent Trump donor. William Wehrum, who oversees clean air policy at the EPA, has long supported efforts undercutting rules like the mercury standards.



**Acting EPA head Andrew Wheeler wants regulations that 'stand the test of time'**

Despite resistance, as of 2018 the coal industry has largely fallen in line with the current EPA regulations. Many companies have already invested in technology and other updates in order to comply with the rules. Environmental advocates have underscored that the new push to roll back the mercury standards flies in the face of those efforts and will have ramifications for human health.

Advertisement

An Amazon recruitment advertisement with a red background. On the left, a pair of hands holds up a cardboard Amazon box. In the center, the text "Join our team" is written in large white letters, with "Multiple shifts available" in smaller white letters below it. On the right, the Amazon logo is displayed above a white button that says "Apply now" with a right-pointing arrow. At the bottom right, there is a small line of text: "Amazon is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Minorities and Women are Encouraged to Apply." followed by a list of categories: "Race / Ethnicity / Disability / Veterans / Gender Identity / Sexual Orientation".

This latest rollback continues a trend, as Trump administration officials have repeatedly relaxed and gutted environmental regulations meant to reign in the industries overseen by the EPA. In August, the EPA proposed a new rule to



replace the Clean Power Plan, which targets coal plant carbon dioxide emissions. The White House [has also proposed bailing out](#) struggling coal and nuclear power plants in an effort to save those industries.

## **We have a problem. And we need your help to solve it.**

ThinkProgress is being targeted by ad networks for producing 'controversial political content.'

Because we cover white nationalism and other controversial topics, ThinkProgress has been placed into a category of sites which many advertisers are blocking. ThinkProgress relies on advertising revenue to fund a substantial portion of our work.

In other words, we are being financially punished for our work exposing racism.

One thing is certain: We will not change our mission or our approach to the news to bring back advertisers.

Will you join us?

**BECOME A MEMBER TODAY**

[#CLIMATE](#), [#COAL](#), [#EPA](#), [#HEALTH](#), [#POLITICS](#)

**This Photo Has Not Been Edited, Look Closer At The Hole**

Trendchaser

Sponsored

## You May Like

Sponsored Links

**Mac Users Guide (2018) - #1 Antivirus Now Free For Mac Only.**

The 10 Best Providers

**Athens, Georgia: This Unbelievable, Tiny Company Is Disrupting a \$200 Billion Industry**

EverQuote Insurance Quotes

**Most People Missed The Giant Blooper In This Iconic 'Forrest Gump' Scene**

IcePop

Sponsored



## Recommended For You

**Melania Trump is taking ‘Be Best’ to Africa, because of course she is**

**Clean air, climate advocates denounce Trump’s proposed repeal of Clean Power Plan**

**Doctor Says Don't Cover Up Your Dark Spots - (Try This Instead)**

Gundry MD

Sponsored



## Recommended For You

**Justice Kennedy did more than any living American to undermine democracy. Now he’s mad about it.**

**Former classmates contradict Kavanaugh, say FBI investigation is too restrictive**

**Luxurious Memory Care Facilities in Athens Could Surprise You**

Assisted Living | Sponsored Links

Sponsored



**Recommended For You**

**Trump dangles blackmail material over head of Democratic senator**

**Brett Kavanaugh can’t stop lying to senators about big and small details**

**Considering an SUV? These Are the 10 Most Fuel Efficient**

Kelley Blue Book

Sponsored

**StairLift Elevators Could Be a Cheaper Luxury Than You Might Think**

StairLift | Sponsored Links

Sponsored

**You May Like**

Sponsored Links

**Most People Missed The Giant Blooper In This Iconic 'Forrest Gump' Scene**

IcePop

**Doctor Says Don't Cover Up Your Dark Spots - (Try This Instead)**

Gundry MD

**Mac Users Guide (2018) - #1 Antivirus Now Free For Mac Only.**

The 10 Best Providers

Sponsored



**Recommended For You**

**Clean air, climate advocates denounce Trump’s proposed repeal of Clean Power Plan**



Melania Trump is taking ‘Be Best’ to Africa, because of course she is

Senior Living Near Athens Can Be Surprisingly Classy

Senior Living | Sponsored Links

Sponsored