

Six Unions Call for Senate Hearing on EPA Coal Regulations

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers President Edwin D. Hill and the heads of five other labor unions are calling on Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to hold a hearing on what effects Environmental Protection Agency Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, or MATS, will have on America's energy markets.

The rule sets limits on air pollutants like mercury, arsenic and metals. The unions argue that the stringency and timeline of the EPA standards are causing the premature shutdown of coal-fired power plants at a time when there is no adequate replacement for the electricity they generate.

"Our unions have consistently raised concerns about the short timeframe for compliance with MATS and what it will do to energy prices, grid reliability and good-paying jobs in the coal-fired generation sector," Hill said.

In a letter to Sens. Wyden and Murkowski, labor leaders warned that compliance with MATS under the EPA's current timeline would result in the closing of 56 gigawatts of coal-fired generation and the loss of 250,000 jobs.

"Despite assurances by the EPA to contrary, our prediction is now coming to pass," the letter said.

Along with the IBEW, SMART Transportation, United Mine Workers, Boilermakers, Utility Workers, and Transportation Communications Union/IAM signed the letter, which warned that the closure of coal-fired plants threatens good jobs and risks that the electric grid will no longer be able to meet current demand, leading to spiraling energy inflation.

"As these (coal-fired) plants retire, sufficient generation assets to meet demand become questionable, as witnessed by the astronomical electric price spikes during the recent polar vortex," the letter said.