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## Obama EPA Reverses Bush Era Rule Allowing More Air Pollution from Industrial Smokestacks

March 29th, 2011



[Glynn Wilson](#)

Alabama Power’s Miller Steam Plant on the Locust Fork River [emits more mercury into the air than any other power plant in the country](#)

by **Glynn Wilson**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency under the administration of President Barack Obama has reversed a 2008 decision by the Bush administration to weaken laws limiting air pollution emissions from industrial smokestacks, especially power plants.

In one of its final actions in office, the Bush administration — which made [international headlines](#) for using industry lobbyists in place of scientists to set national environmental policy — allowed the state environmental agency to ease restrictions on the amount of air emissions allowed from industrial sources such as Alabama Power and Tennessee Valley Authority power plants. But thanks in part to intensive lobbying and a lawsuit by state and national environmental groups, and the Obama administration’s commitment to getting back to using sound science to form national policy, the EPA reversed that rule on Tuesday.

The ruling is a victory for cleaner air across Alabama and especially in areas such as heavily-polluted Birmingham and Jefferson County, which has failed to meet federal air quality standards for dangerous fine particulates for many years, according to Michael Churchman, executive director of the Alabama Environmental Council.

“What happened here is that some of Alabama’s polluters convinced regulators to relax a rule that had been on the books for 30 years – only after citizens sued to enforce that rule. Today, the EPA recognized that was the wrong decision,” Churchman said in reacting to the news locally. “Technology is used all over the country to better control emissions and should be required to operate continuously in Alabama.”

The Birmingham area has been failing to meet minimum federal air quality standards for fine particles (soot) for seven years. These airborne, microscopic solids and liquid droplets (made up of acids, organic chemicals, metals, and other matter) can lodge deeply in the lungs and bloodstream, aggravating a number of cardiopulmonary diseases.

“There is a demonstrated link between fine particle pollution and asthma in children,” said Tiffany Schauer, Executive Director of Our Children’s Earth Foundation. “Thanks to today’s action, every family in Alabama can breathe a little easier.”

Reacting to the news nationally, David Muhly of the Sierra Club indicated that the Bush administration rushed a “dirty decision out the door just before leaving office to satisfy the demands of two of the biggest polluters in America.”

“Alabama’s residents deserve better, and we are optimistic that today’s news signals the promise of healthier air,” he said.

Several years ago, frustrated citizens brought legal action against some power plants, alleging violations of Alabama’s smog control laws. In response, utility and industrial groups lobbied the state and federal government heavily to relax these laws, succeeding on their third attempt when the Bush administration succumbed to industry pressure in 2008.

“We are gratified that EPA has embraced public health and sound science, and rejected the prior

unprotective rules,” said John Walke, clean air director for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

In a lawsuit filed by [GreenLaw](#), four environmental advocacy groups — the [Alabama Environmental Council](#), the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), the [Sierra Club](#) and [Our Children’s Earth Foundation](#) — challenged the Bush administration’s action. The federal court decided to allow EPA to reconsider its earlier decision, and Tuesday, EPA rejected the rule relaxation.

“I believe that today’s action will significantly help clean up the state’s air and protect public health,” Churchman said. “And, at a time when many see the environment competing with the economy, it is great to see EPA’s recognition of no anticipated increase in cost of compliance for sources that were already in compliance with previous requirements.”


You can [read the EPA announcement on the Web here](#) and a [fact sheet on the issue here](#) for more information.



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## One Response to “Obama EPA Reverses Bush Era Rule Allowing More Air Pollution from Industrial Smokestacks”

1.  [Glynn Wilson](#) Says:  
[March 30th, 2011 at 9:18 am](#)

Not included in this breaking news story is that the decision will create more jobs, including union jobs, at power plants. Workers from the UA Local 91 in Birmingham have more expertise at installing pollution control equipment at power plants than any other workers around, I’m told.