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The 27 Worst Cement Kilns for Mercury Pollution

EPA, Finally, Will Crack Down on Major Polluters

By Dan Shapley



Photo: Thaddeus Robertson

After years of litigation, it appears that environmental groups and states have won a victory against the Environmental Protection Agency, which had [refused for 10 years](#) to set mercury emissions limits on cement kilns, one of the largest sources of pollution in the country. The news came to us from Earthjustice, the group that has, in collaboration with national and local environmental groups, led the legal fight to see this mercury pollution reined in.

The EPA had cracked down on mercury from power plants in recent years, though that regulation was recently tossed by the courts. But the EPA had refused, despite four court decisions stating that the Clean Air Act required mercury regulation from major industrial sources like cement manufacturing plants, to set first-ever limits.

The cement industry is heavily consolidated and controlled by international companies that are, in many cases, based outside the United States. While the U.S. economy demands cement, the pollution is dumped domestically while the profits are exported. Mercury fallout from burning coal and processing limestone contaminates lakes, rivers and reservoirs, where elemental mercury is transformed into toxic methylmercury. That neurotoxin enters the food chain and can damage the brains of fetuses and young children who eat, or whose mothers eat, contaminated fish.

Here's a list of the 27 cement kilns that emitted more than 100 pounds of mercury in 2006. (View [all 100](#) in the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory.

Note, however, this caveat from Earthjustice: "The TRI depends on voluntary emissions estimates that may significantly understate kilns' actual pollution levels. Individual cement kilns in New York, Michigan and Oregon routinely understated their emissions until being required by state officials to conduct emissions tests – at which point it was evident that their actual emissions were approximately ten times higher than previously reported. The Lafarge kiln in Ravena, New York previously reported mercury emissions of only 40 pounds. It now acknowledges emitting more than 400 pounds per year."

Biggest Cement Kiln Mercury Polluters, 2006

Pounds – Facility, Location

1. 2,582 – Ash Grove Cement Co., Durkee, Baker County, Ore.
2. 654 – California Portland Cement Co., Colton, San Bernardino County, Calif.
3. 586 – Lehigh Southwest Cement Co., Tehachapi, Kern County, Calif.
4. 522 – Ash Grove Cement Co., Chanute, Neosho, Kan.
5. 496 – Hanson Permanente Cement, Cupertino, Santa Clara County, Calif.
6. 472 – Ash Grove Cement Co., Foreman, Little River County, Ark.
7. 417 – LaFarge Midwest Inc., Alpena, Alpena County, Mich.
8. 416 – LaFarge Building Materials Inc., Ravena, Albany County, N.Y.
9. 271 – Cemex California Cement LLC, Victorville, San Bernardino County, Calif.
10. 252 – River Cement Co., Festus, Jefferson County, Mo.
11. 241 – Cemex Cement of Texas LP, New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas
12. 225 – Cemex de Puerto Rico Inc., Ponce, Ponce County, Puerto Rico
13. 208 – National Cement Co. of Alabama, Ragland, St. Clair County, Ala.
14. 190 – Lehigh Cement Co., Mason City, Cerro Gordo County, Iowa

15. 176 – Essroc Cement Corp., Speed, Clark County, Ind.
16. 172 – RMC Pacific Materials, Davenport, Santa Cruz County, Calif.
17. 163 – Essroc Cement Corp., Nazareth, Northampton County, Penn.
18. 161 – Mitsubishi Cement Corp., Lucerne Valley, San Bernardino County, Calif.
19. 160 – Buzzi Unicem USA, Cape Girardeau, Cape Girardeau County, Mo.
20. 159 – Lehigh Cement Co., Mitchel, Lawrence County, Ind.
21. 153 – Ash Grove Cement, Leamington, Leamington County, Utah
22. 151 – Essroc Cement Corp., Bessemer, Lawrence County, Penn.
23. 149 – Capitol Cement Corp., Martinsburg, Berkeley, W.Va.
24. 130 – Buzzi Unicem USA, Greencastle, Putnam County, Ind.
25. 120 – Holcim (US), Dundee, Monroe County, Mich.
26. 106 – Holcim U.S. Inc., Clarksville, Pike County, Mo.
27. 105 – Keystone Cement Co., Bath, Northampton, Penn.