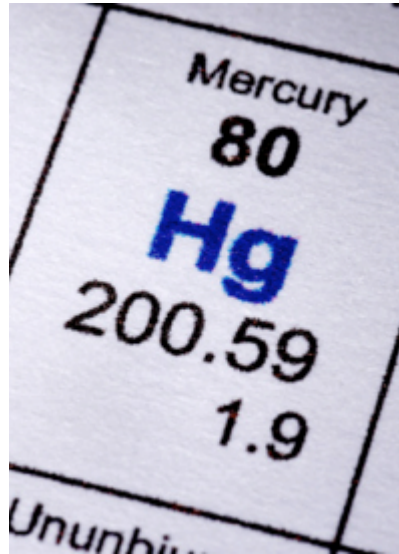




Written by [James Heiser](#) on January 4, 2010

## EPA Program Spreads Toxins on America's Farmland

In the midst of the push for environmental regulation in connection with the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declared carbon dioxide — a substance produced by human respiration, among other means — a danger to public health. However, it appears that the EPA has a far more tolerant view to mercury, arsenic, and lead, since it is encouraging American farmers to spread these and other heavy metals on their fields.



According to a [report](#) in the *Washington Post*:

The federal government is encouraging farmers to spread a chalky waste from coal-fired power plants on their fields to loosen and fertilize soil even as it considers regulating coal wastes for the first time.

The material is produced by power plant "scrubbers" that remove acid-rain-causing sulfur dioxide from plant emissions. A synthetic form of the mineral gypsum, it also contains mercury, arsenic, lead and other heavy metals....

With wastes piling up around the coal-fired plants that produce half the nation's power, the EPA and U.S. Department of Agriculture began promoting what they call the wastes' "beneficial uses" during the Bush administration.

Part of that push is to expand the use of synthetic gypsum — a whitish, calcium-rich material known as flue gas desulfurization gypsum, or FGD gypsum. The Obama administration has continued promoting FGD gypsum's use in farming.

Thus, the EPA intends that the substances carefully "scrubbed" from plant emissions for the stated purpose of keeping them from polluting the environment are to be spread around where much of the nation's food is grown. Why? Because the waste is piling up, and they have not been able to determine another use for it.

Amazingly, the same quantities of mercury, for example, which were apparently too toxic to release from the coal-fired power plants are suddenly less dangerous when they are scattered over farm fields. Again, according to the article in the *Washington Post*:

Field studies have shown that mercury, the main heavy metal of concern because it can harm nervous-system development, does not accumulate in crops or run off fields in surface water at "significant" levels, the EPA said.

"EPA believes that the use of FGD gypsum in agriculture is safe in appropriate soil and hydrogeologic conditions," the statement said.

But why, one might ask, should the plants go to the trouble of collecting and concentrating such hazardous substances in the first place if the government is simply going to encourage releasing them



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right back into the environment in the end? Would not the least dangerous disposal of such "insignificant" levels of heavy metals be to have as wide of an area of dispersal as possible, rather than compounding the toxins in a small area, and spreading them in the fields?

Government programs beget more government programs. One government program sets stringent guidelines to carefully collect the toxins produced by our nation's power plants, which, in turn, necessitates another government program to determine what to do with the collected waste. Presumably, in a generation or so, the EPA and USDA will develop another program to remove newly discovered "dangerous" levels of heavy metals from the soil of America's heartland.

One thing that is certain is that the program is steadily expanding:

Since the EPA-USDA partnership began in 2001, farmers' use of the material has more than tripled, from about 78,000 tons spread on fields in 2002 to nearly 279,000 tons last year, according to the American Coal Ash Association, a utility industry group.

About half of the 17.7 million tons of FGD gypsum produced in the United States last year was used to make drywall, said Thomas Adams, the association's executive director. But he said it is important to find new uses for it and other coal wastes because the United States will probably rely on coal-fired power plants for decades to come.

"If we can find safe ways to recycle those materials, we're a lot better off doing that than we are creating a whole bunch of new landfills," Adams said.

The story between the lines of such reporting is that despite all of the supposed environmental concern over coal-fired power plants, the government is establishing programs that appear to assume a steady supply of waste generated by such plants for years to come. After all, if "cap and trade" taxation produces an entirely new "revenue stream" for the federal government, what incentive would politicians have for eliminating the very source of that new income?



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