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Industry groups file comments on EPA's air toxics rule for new units

By [Jonathan Crawford](#)

While the U.S. EPA's proposed reconsideration of its Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, or MATS, for new units has been generally [well-received](#), industry groups raised a few additional issues in public comments.

Interested parties had until Jan. 7 to file comments on the EPA's proposed reconsideration, which entailed changes to the power plant emissions limits for mercury, particulate matter, acid gases and certain metals that were made based on new information and analysis. The EPA was pressed to make the changes after pollution control manufacturers and industry groups argued that the original standards it issued were unachievable.

The Railroad Commission of Texas, or RRC, said in its [comments](#) that the EPA failed to properly consider the reliability impacts that the MATS rule for new units could have on the state because of errors the agency had made in its underlying assumptions about the electric grid, which the commission said the agency failed to correct at the commission's urging.

"Rather than perpetuating its analytical errors, the RRC strongly urges the EPA to thoroughly reconsider its analysis so that the effects of this rule on electric reliability in Texas may be transparent and accurate," the RRC said in its Jan. 7 public comments.

The American Clean Skies Foundation, or ACSF, a nonprofit advocacy group that favors expanded use of natural gas, renewables and efficiency, said in its [comments](#) that the EPA should have recognized fuel switching to natural gas as a compliance option under the revised rules.

"EPA must go 'beyond the floor' — and set emission limits based on alternative compliance options such as fuel switching — where greater emission reductions are achievable," the ACSF said in a Jan. 7 news release. "Notably, natural gas is abundant and affordable, and building a new gas-fired plant is generally significantly less expensive than building a new coal plant."

The regulatory "floor" in MATS is based on what emissions reductions can be achieved by the emissions control equipment used by the best-controlled similar source.

Under the ACSF's proposal, if natural gas is available and cost-effective at a specific location, a new power plant in that area would be subject to emissions standards achieved by a modern, natural gas-fired power plant. But if natural gas is not available or is not cost-effective, the standards set for coal- and oil-fired power plants would kick in.

The [Platte River Power Authority](#), a nonprofit wholesale electric utility providing power to municipal utilities that serve communities in Estes Park, Fort Collins, Longmont and Loveland, Colo., said it "strongly advocates" that the EPA retain the quarterly particulate matter, or PM, stack testing compliance demonstration option.

"The quarterly stack testing option allows sources with well-designed and maintained particulate control devices to demonstrate their low emitting [electric utility steam generating unit] status and avoid the installation, operation, and maintenance concerns associated with PM CEMS [continuous emissions monitoring systems] and PM CPMS [or continuous parameter monitoring system]," the Platte River Power Authority said in its Dec. 20, 2012, comments. "Quarterly stack testing also provides an essential fall-back option should PM CEMS or PM CPMS not meet source or agency expectations."

The EPA has indicated that it expects to finalize its proposed reconsideration of [MATS in March](#).