Currently, there are 7 coal plants in Maryland that have technology-based water pollution protections from 1982.

This means that coal plants have been dumping toxins into our waterways based on the limits established 35 years ago and what’s worse, these limits don’t include safeguards on mercury, arsenic, selenium and other harmful toxins. Would you want a phone from 1982? Probably not. So why would we want water “protections” from that time?

In 2015, President Obama updated those water protections to reduce the amount of toxic metals, nutrients, and other pollutants the coal plants are allowed to dump across the country by 1.4 billion pounds. This is important because for the first time, there were safeguards that would apply in Maryland for dangerous toxics such as lead, mercury, selenium, and arsenic. However, these safeguards wouldn’t be put into action until the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) updated each of the plants’ permits.

Two years later, MDE still hasn’t updated three of the plants’ permits, which have been expired since 2014. MDE has published drafts of these permits, but they don’t even include protections for the most harmful toxins.

Coal plants are the number one source of toxic water pollution in the country. It is important that MDE uses the updated standards to stop coal plants from polluting our water.

POLLUTION FACTS

- The pollutants discharged by these coal plants can cause severe health and environmental problems in the form of cancer and non-cancer risks in humans, lowered IQ among children, and deformities and reproductive harm in fish and wildlife.
- Due to their close proximity to these discharges and relatively high consumption of fish, some minority and low-income communities have greater exposure to, and are therefore at greater risk from, pollutants from coal-fired power plants.
- Many of these pollutants, once in the environment, remain there for years.

Arsenic
Drinking large amounts of arsenic consistently causes cancer, including lung cancer, skin tumors, internal organ tumors, and is connected to heart problems, nervous system disorders, and stomach pain.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) estimates that nearly 140,000 people each year experience increased cancer risk due to arsenic in fish from coal-fired power plants.

Selenium
Selenium is acutely poisonous to fish and aquatic life in even small doses; concentrations below 3-8 micrograms per liter can kill fish, and lower concentrations can leave fish deformed or sterile.

Chalk Point
The Chalk Point Generating Station, owned by NRG Energy Inc., dumps its water into the Lower Patuxent River in Prince George’s County. Operating since 1964, this outdated coal-fired power plant has a permit that was expired in 2014. This coal plant draws nearly 700 million gallons of water per day.

In relation to the 2015 safeguards, the plant exceeded the limit for arsenic and selenium regularly from June of 2013 through June 2017.
DICKERSON
The Dickerson Generating Station, owned by Gen-On Mid-Atlantic LLC and NRG Energy Inc., dumps its water into the Potomac River in Montgomery County. Operating since 1959, this outdated coal-fired power plant has a permit that was expired in 2014. In addition to being 3 coal-fired powered boilers, it also has a 2 fracked gas units attached to the generating station. This coal plant draws more than 400 million gallons of water per day.

In relation to the 2015 safeguards, the plant exceeded the limit for arsenic and selenium regularly from June of 2013 through June 2017.

MORGANTOWN
The Morgantown Generating Station, owned by NRG Energy Inc., dumps its water into the Lower Potomac River in Charles County. Operating since 1970, this outdated coal-fired power plant has a permit that was expired in 2014. This coal plant draws over 1.8 billion gallons of water per day.

In relation to the 2015 safeguards, the plant exceeded the limit for arsenic and selenium regularly from June of 2013 through June 2017.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP
Tell the MDE to clean up our waters and stop coal plants from polluting our drinking water! Go to sc.org/MDwater to find out more!

Contact: Patrick Greter, Senior Campaign Representative at the Sierra Club at patrick.greter@sierraclub.org or (412) 889-8787.