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## Lake group praises Nevada mercury plan

By [Joe Bauman](#)

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A group dedicated to protecting the environment of the Great Salt Lake is praising a new program proposed by the state of Nevada to control mercury emissions.

The contaminant is released into the environment when coal is burned and can be released during certain mining operations. It can build up in wildlife, occasionally reaching levels that require limiting human consumption of certain species of fish and waterfowl.

According to the environmental advocates Great Salt Lakekeeper, Utah was one of the last five states in the nation to issue consumption advisories for mercury in fish. It has also issued advisories for certain types of waterfowl from marshes near the Great Salt Lake.

The Nevada Division of Environmental Protection announced last week it is launching the Nevada Mercury Air Emissions Control Program for precious metal mining operations. It would be the first regulatory program of its kind to control mercury emissions from such mining, the department's administrator, Leo Drozdoff, said in a press release.

The proposed regulatory changes would vary "significantly from the voluntary program," says the release. It would require improved and additional controls.

Jeff Salt, whose title in the environmental group is Great Salt Lakekeeper, said the organization is pleased with the Nevada proposal. The precious metals mining industry has "produced such large amounts of mercury to the environment without regulation," he said.

"This new regulatory program could prove to be a unique and important solution for reducing mercury levels throughout the intermountain region," Salt said.

Salt said the group is optimistically cautious.

"We still need to study the details of the regulatory program to determine if the proposed reduction targets are sufficient," he said.

Nevada officials cited an Environmental Protection Agency report that the most recent yearly

mercury emission figure for four major gold mining operations was 3,755 pounds, down from the 2001 level of 21,098 pounds.

"Nevada's voluntary program with the industry was remarkable in that it reduced emissions in advance of any formal regulatory framework," the release quotes Wayne Nastri, administrator of the EPA's Pacific Southwest Office. "We believe the new program will build on those earlier successes to further reduce mercury emissions."

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