

NEWS RELEASE

Ontario's costly coal phase-out did not significantly reduce air pollution—a lesson for Ottawa

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For immediate release

TORONTO—Shutting Ontario's coal-fired power plants had very little effect on reducing air pollution, helped fuel skyrocketing energy costs, and should serve as a lesson to policymakers across the country, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan, Canadian public policy think-tank.

These findings confirm the government's own internal forecasts prior to the coal phase-out, and they are especially important as the federal government plans to force the phase out of coal-fired power generation in Canada by 2030.

“Ontario's example should serve as a warning to the federal government, which is making the same grandiose claims about the benefits of eliminating coal while seemingly ignoring the crisis of Ontario's soaring energy costs,” said Ross McKittrick, professor of economics at the University of Guelph, Fraser Institute senior fellow, and co-author of [*Did the Coal Phase-out Reduce Ontario Air Pollution?*](#)

The study analyzed air pollution changes in Hamilton, Toronto and Ottawa from 2005 to 2014 and found that the coal phase-out had no effect on nitrogen oxide levels, an important component of smog, and produced only a small reduction in fine particulates, a common measure of air pollution.

In Toronto and Hamilton, the reduction in fine particulates was statistically insignificant.

In fact, had the province completed its modernization of the coal-fired plants, instead of shutting them down, fine particulate reductions of the same size could have been achieved at a much lower cost.

Moreover, in 2005, all electricity power generation—including coal—comprised just 0.7 per cent of fine particulate emissions in Ontario. In fact, residential wood-burning fireplaces contributed 20 times more fine particulate emissions than electrical power generation.

“Ontario closed its coal-fired plants with promises to greatly reduce air pollution and save billions in health costs, neither of which came true. Now the province has some of the highest electricity rates in North America,” said Kenneth Green, senior director of natural resource studies at the Fraser Institute.

“Policymakers in Ottawa should note how Ontario's coal phase-out failed to achieve its stated goals as they promise to impose the same failed strategy nationally,” McKittrick said.

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