Controlling Mercury Pollution in China and India
How the Minamata Convention on Mercury could affect emissions from coal power plants

What is the Minamata Convention?
The Minamata Convention on Mercury, adopted by the UN in 2013, aims to reduce global mercury pollution and protect human health by setting limits on specific pollution sources and prohibiting new mercury mining. Some specifics of the treaty requirements are still being determined. For instance, the convention gives nations the flexibility to create their own plans for reducing mercury emissions from some sources, like coal-fired power plants. How nations choose to address these emissions will impact global and regional mercury pollution, since coal-fired power plants are responsible for about a quarter of mercury emissions worldwide.

Why are India and China important?
China is currently estimated to emit about a third of global emissions, and India is the second largest source at 7 percent. These emissions come from a variety of activities—mining, cement production, metal smelting—but coal combustion for industry and electricity generation is one of the biggest sources in these countries, and this source is expected to grow as economies develop.

Study Methodology
Researchers evaluated different methods of reducing mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants, and how emissions travel through the atmosphere and enter ecosystems. Through analysis of existing studies, policies, and interviews with Convention negotiators, researchers identified technologies that India and China would likely adopt if given flexibility. They also studied the effect of stronger technology requirements and an energy-systems approach away from coal toward low-carbon energy sources.

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