



BEYOND TOXICS

Leadership For a Clean and Just Oregon

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6/25/2012

Dear Mayor Piercy and Members of the City Council,

Beyond Toxics wishes to express our strong support for Commissioner Zelenka's proposal to restrict the export of coal by train through Eugene's rail yard and our neighborhoods in West Eugene. We hope that the City Council will pass this resolution and send a message to the state and federal government that mining, transporting and shipping coal overseas from Oregon has long-term and considerable negative consequences.

Our concern is that numerous daily coal trains, some as much as mile and half long – coming into Eugene, stopping in Eugene, changing tracks in Eugene and leaving through Eugene – would pose a severe health risk not only to the neighborhoods closest to the tracks but to all Eugene residents.

The US EPA has recently expressed their concern about the public health impacts of exposure to coal dust and diesel particulate from the transport of coal in the Northwest. In a letter to the US Army Corps of Engineers dated April 14, 2012 regarding various projects to export coal from ports in the Pacific Northwest (including the Port of Morrow and the Port of Coos Bay), the US EPA stated:

"Our primary concerns related to the potential adverse effects from coal dust and diesel pollution. Coal dust is a human health concern because it can cause pneumoconiosis, bronchitis and emphysema. Coal dust is an environmental concern because it may settle on water, soil and vegetation and may impair biological processes such as photosynthesis. In addition coal dust has been shown to cause tumors in experimental animals. We are similarly concerned about diesel emissions because they can cause lung damage, aggravate respiratory disease such as asthma and are thought to be a human carcinogen."

If open trainloads of coal go through Eugene it will be a health concern for everyone, *but especially for children*. The neighborhoods around the rail yard and the tracks heading to the west already have high rates of childhood asthma, perhaps one of the highest in the state. We cannot allow several coal trains to come through Eugene each and every day, placing a greater burden of air pollution on the lungs of our children.

People suffering from asthma know that exhaling air is the most difficult thing to do during an asthma attack. Without the ability to exhale air, the lungs stay inflated with stagnant air that has become oxygen depleted; the lungs can't work to bring fresh oxygen to the bloodstream. The person's skin and nails may turn blue from lack of oxygen – it is like drowning.

A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine a few years ago showed that children exposed to particulate matter during childhood are 5 times more likely to have reduced lung function and can't normally exhale spent air. The researchers' conclusion was that measurable levels of air pollution have chronic, adverse effects on lung development in children from the age of 10 to 18 years, leading to clinically significant deficits in the ability to breathe normally as children reach adulthood.

Roughly 3,600 people die each year in the United States from asthma. Individuals with asthma often underestimate the severity of their condition and often rely on 'rescue medicine' such as an albuterol inhaler to control their symptoms. According to one national asthma researcher at a National Health Center in Colorado, "These people are at increased risk of a severe and even fatal attack when they encounter 'triggers' for their asthma."

Pollution from coal trains is an asthma trigger, without a doubt.

Beyond Toxics believes that the public has a right to say no to the plans to haul dirty coal and the negative consequences to environmental and public health. The City of Eugene has been a leader in creative, forward thinking on a clean environment. As City Councilors speaking on behalf of the health of local residents, you have the right to participate in the decision-making process from the very beginning, and to use information about public health, climate change, fossil fuel consumption to make the case that we should not transport coal through our communities for export overseas.

Coal trains rumbling through Eugene will create more diesel exhaust from increased locomotor activity. Reducing black carbon generated by diesel exhaust may be one of the most significant actions that can be taken in the short-term to address global warming. Recent scientific research indicates that black carbon may be over 2000 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a global warming agent.

At a time when our City and our Country are looking for ways to create green jobs and a clean environment, stopping the use of coal as a fuel stands out as a prime example of local steps we can take to make a difference. There are clear negative environmental and climate impacts of transporting coal. Thank you for taking action and leading the way to a better future for our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Arkin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Arkin, Executive Director