

POWER PAST COAL

communities against coal export | powerpastcoal.org

As health professionals from across Washington State, we are deeply concerned about the health and safety impacts of the proposals to build massive coal terminals in Whatcom, Cowlitz and Grays Harbor counties. If built, these facilities would make Washington the largest center for coal export in the continent and would dramatically increase coal train traffic throughout the state. We call on the state to conduct a comprehensive Health Impact Assessment before making any decision to proceed with these proposals.

The proposed coal export terminals would add more than 40 one-and-a-half mile long coal trains traveling across the state and through our communities each day (as many as 18 per day in Puget Sound) and hundreds of additional ships traversing our waterways each year. This traffic would result in significant increases in the release of airborne pollutants from diesel engines and coal dust. The increased train traffic will also cause significant delays at many rail crossings (increasing response times for emergency responders) and increased risk of vehicle and pedestrian injuries along the tracks.

Washington doctors have carefully reviewed the data published in peer-reviewed medical journals and concluded that:

Diesel particulate matter is associated with (See [Appendix A](#), [Appendix C](#)):

- impaired pulmonary development in adolescents;
- increased cardiopulmonary mortality and all-cause mortality;
- measurable pulmonary inflammation;
- increased severity and frequency of asthma attacks, ER visits, and hospital admissions in children;
- increased rates of myocardial infarction (heart attack) in adults;
- increased risk of cancer.

Coal dust is associated with (See [Appendix B](#)):

- chronic bronchitis;
- emphysema;
- pulmonary fibrosis (pneumoconiosis);
- environmental contamination through the leaching of toxic heavy metals

Frequent long trains at rail crossings will mean (See [Appendix E](#)):

- delayed emergency medical service response times;
- increased accidents, traumatic injury and death.

The effects of air pollution are not hypothetical, but real and measurable. Many of the reviewed studies, some of which were conducted in the Seattle and Spokane areas, show significant health effects of exposure to everyday airborne pollutant levels that are below national U.S.

Environment Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines. The data show a linear effect with no specific “safe threshold.”

The conclusion that airborne pollutants pose a significant and measurable health risk was also found by the American Lung Association, in their review, “State of the Air 2011,” and by the American Heart Association, in their 2011 review, “Particulate Matter Air Pollution and Cardiovascular Disease.”

Puget Sound is in particular danger from diesel air pollution. A recent study from the National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment released by the EPA states that, “the Puget Sound region ranks in the country’s top five percent of risk for exposure to toxic air pollution.” A study in 2010 by the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency and the University of Washington showed that of the hundreds of air toxic pollutants, “Diesel emissions remain the largest contributor to potential cancer risk in the Puget Sound area.”

Coal dust can cause significant impacts in communities near the tracks and coal export facilities. Burlington Northern Santa Fe has estimated that each Coal train can lose as much as 500 lbs per car in transit from mine to terminal. Coal dust impacts are pervasive on the rail lines and near shipping. For example, residents in Point Roberts, Washington regularly experience significant issues with coal dust from the Roberts Bank facility in Canada, more than three miles from the marina. http://tdn.com/news/local/article_35ad9c0c-3634-11e0-8eea-001cc4c03286.html. As demonstrated in Appendix B, coal dust is not just a nuisance for home and boat owners, it is an air pollutant that can pose a danger to human health.

As health professionals, we feel the risks to human health from massive coal shipments across our state and through our communities are significant, and we call for a comprehensive Health Impact Assessment, in addition to an Environmental Impact Statement, addressing these issues along the entire rail corridor. While these studies are highly complex and require substantial resources and oversight, we feel they will, if done correctly, reveal that the potential for harm to human health and our environment are considerable and should not be ignored.

A scientific review of these health issues is available in the Appendices A-E to this Statement.

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