

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community leaders ask Oakland Council to vote NO on coal in light of experts' findings

Public health experts highlight risks of coal trains

OAKLAND, Calif. – A public health experts panel today released the results of an independent inquiry (<http://tinyurl.com/CoalTransport>) into the health and safety hazards of the proposal to ship coal through Oakland.

The study, *An Assessment of the Health and Safety Implications of Coal Transport through Oakland*, assessed the health and safety risk of transporting up to 10 million tons of coal per year through the proposed bulk export terminal at the former Oakland Army Base.

The study found that coal trains significantly increase concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in communities along rail lines due to emissions of both coal dust and diesel exhaust.

PM2.5, even at levels already found in Oakland, is definitively associated with premature death and many severe medical problems including increases in lung cancer, hospitalization for heart and lung disease, emergency room visits, asthma attacks, adverse birth outcomes, school and work loss and respiratory symptoms.

The report concluded that the introduction of a new PM2.5 source - coal trains - would inevitably increase the frequency and severity of these poor health outcomes.

“This is a public health issue, and public health experts should have a voice in this process,” said Health Panel Representative Dr. Bart Ostro, former Chief of Air Pollution Epidemiology for the California EPA. “If this project is allowed by the Oakland City Council, coal and diesel pollutants are likely to combine to push outdoor air concentrations of particulate matter above state, federal and international levels deemed safe. Any increase in air pollution will have a significantly greater impact on West Oakland, immediately adjacent to the terminal. This is an area already disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of air pollution and with high rates of emergency room visits and hospitalization for asthma and heart disease as well as cancer risk from existing pollution.”

Sen. Loni Hancock, D-Oakland, author of a package of bills to block the project, agreed.

“This study spells out the serious health impacts of coal dust and underlines the dangers that would face people living in West Oakland,” Hancock said. “I hope that the City Council will consider and act on the information these health professionals have provided.”

The Oakland City Council is scheduled to vote on coal at a special meeting June 27.

“The council has the authority to pass a full ban on coal exports if they have evidence of substantial health and safety impacts on neighboring communities. This is the evidence,” said Ms. Margaret Gordon, Co-Director of West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project and a member of No Coal in Oakland. “The public health study supports the message from Oakland residents and political leaders throughout the East Bay and Sacramento: NO coal in Oakland. Not coal with covered cars that don’t exist, or any other supposed mitigation measures that are experimental and hasn’t been thoroughly tested.

“Only a complete ban of coal exports from the marine terminal will ensure the health and safety of our community.”

Members of the Public Health Advisory Panel on Coal in Oakland are available to discuss the results of their findings with the press. Their contact information is below.

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