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Multnomah County: Coal Train Traffic Could Exacerbate Health Issues in Multnomah County *Oregon Physicians Respond with Call for Cumulative, Comprehensive Health Impact Assessment*

Today Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen released the results of a health analysis of the effects of coal trains traveling through Oregon's most populous county. The study, though limited in scope to a literature review and spatial analysis, demonstrates that air quality is already challenging and will become worse with the additional burden of coal export trains. Other risks identified through this analysis include: lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, "roadway congestion, collisions, and the disproportionate impact on environmental justice communities, such as people of color and people already exposed to the health burdens of industrial processes."

"We are grateful for Chair Cogen's initiative and Multnomah County staff who are champions for public health. This study represents a key step forward. It demonstrates that the time is right for development of a truly comprehensive and cumulative Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The public deserves to know if coal dust and increased diesel emissions are as toxic as many physicians believe," said Dr. Andy Harris of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (OPSR).

Such a comprehensive HIA will add value to several critical public processes and policies. "Adequate resources for a regional HIA that fully examines significant foreseeable and negative impacts must come soon – before decisions are made," said Regna Merritt, Campaign Director for OPSR.

"Coal is the dirtiest and most dangerous fossil fuel. Coal exports through the Pacific Northwest would nullify progress made and create new sources of morbidity and

mortality. Oregon’s first permits are coming up April 1. In the absence of a comprehensive HIA and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), these state permits must be denied,” said OPSR’s Dr. Martin Donohoe.

The National Research Council definition of HIA is

...a systematic process that uses an array of data sources and analytic methods and considers input from stakeholders to determine the potential effects of a proposed policy, plan, program, or project on the health of a population and the distribution of the effects within the population. HIA provides recommendations on monitoring and managing those effects.¹

Physicians for Social Responsibility found, in 2009, that coal pollutants affect all major body organ systems and contribute to four of the five leading causes of mortality in the U.S.: heart disease, cancer, stroke and lower respiratory diseases. PSR is particularly concerned with preventing negative health impacts to environmental justice communities and those most vulnerable to the impacts of coal, including infants, children, women over 50, the elderly, those with pre-existing disease, and exposed workers.

Over 350 Oregon and Washington physicians, and hundreds of other health professionals and public health advocates, recognize significant risks associated with coal exports and have called for a comprehensive HIA before decisions are made. Resolutions passed by City Councils in Portland, Milwaukee and Eugene, Oregon in 2012 explicitly request review of a comprehensive HIA. The Metro Council, which represents over 1.5 million Oregon residents, passed a resolution calling for “a thorough review of the cumulative potential impacts on the region’s economy, transportation system, air quality public health, environment and people...” Staff from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) stated to a record-breaking number of attendees at a December meeting that agency decisions would benefit from such a comprehensive HIA.

At least 600 health professionals, 400 local businesses, 220 faith leaders, 30 municipalities, and some Northwest Tribes including the Lummi Nation and the Yakama Nation have indicated concern or disapproval of coal export proposals.

Attachment 1: Oregon Municipal/Regional Resolutions Call for
Comprehensive HIA or Cumulative Review of Health Impacts;
The Yakama Nation Supports Call for HIA

Attachment 2: Oregon Physician Position Statement

Attachment 3: Sample Questions for a Comprehensive, Cumulative Health Impact
Assessment

Attachment 4: Sample of Regional GPT E-Scoping Comments

¹. Committee on Health Impact Assessment, National Research Council. *Improving Health in the United States: The Role of Health Impact Assessment*. Wash, DC: National Academies Press; 2011.

Guided by the values and expertise of medicine and public health, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (OPSR) works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. Visit www.oregonpsr.org

OPSR partners with POWER PAST COAL, an ever-growing alliance of health, environmental, businesses, clean-energy, faith and community groups working to stop coal export off the West Coast. Visit www.powerpastcoal.org.

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