

# health concerns

about coal export in the northwest

**The proposed coal terminals and trains pose a significant risk to human health and safety. Over 600 health professionals have either come out against or raised concerns about the proposed terminals and trains.**

*Coal companies and their allies tell us we shouldn't be worried about pollution or dust.*

*Here are some of the concerns from health professionals and public health advocates about coal exports and the need for more information about health impacts:*

**"Cowlitz County has the second highest asthma rate in the state,** with 13 percent of adults afflicted, according to the Washington Department of Health. Cowlitz County's asthma rate stands out, even in a state with one of the highest asthma rates in the nation.

*"As a critical care nurse, I already see suffering in our community from poor air quality and respiratory illnesses. We have to consider the long-term health of our community and opt for a healthier future than dirty coal exports. We can do better."*

*Stella Anderson, RN, Cowlitz County, Washington*

*"We know from the data that the **coal trains would negatively impact the health of our communities** because of increased air pollution from diesel particulates and coal dust, **delays in emergency response time because of long waits at railroad crossings**, and increases in noise pollution in our communities."*

*Melissa Weakland, MD*

*The Washington Academy of Family Physicians*

*"We understand there are other concerns associated with the transport and subsequent burning of coal in Asia that may have global health effects including global warming, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions from coal extraction, processing and burning of coal. **These impacts may have far-reaching population health implications, including in this state.**"*

*Mary Selecky, Secretary of Health, Washington State*

*"I would like an economic analysis of the cost of asthma exacerbations, all along the route, due to the train and ship pollution... the hidden costs of asthma runs into the millions."*

*Greg Wolgamot, MD PhD, partial public comment submitted during scoping for Cherry Point coal export terminal.*

**POWER PAST COAL**  
communities against coal export

“Coal dust has been shown to coat the lungs of coal miners, contributing to problems like chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, cancer and death.”

*KUOW, 3/11/13, What Coal-Train Dust Means For Human Health*

“...There are many potential serious health impacts that merit close scrutiny...”

Diesel pollution has been shown to have an effect on mortality, asthma, heart disease, stroke and cancer for people living in close proximity to high traffic diesel train lines and diesel truck routes. **I am also concerned about the environmental effects of mercury in our watershed. A substantial portion of this comes from coal burned in Asia. The pollutants travel through the atmosphere and deposit in North America. This can cause neurocognitive effects on children...”**

*Dr. Richard Binder, MD, partial public comment submitted during scoping for Cherry Point coal export terminal.*

**“Residents along the tracks in Spokane already have higher mortality rates, partially because of the diesel exhaust and coal dust that already pollute their neighborhoods.** A Spokane physician submitted evidence about a “cancer cluster” near the tracks, and another resident informed the panel that diesel exhaust has now been officially declared a carcinogen. Coal dust contains mercury, lead, arsenic, cadmium, barium, selenium, and other toxic elements.”

*Nick Gier, Professor Emeritus, University of Idaho*

The Multnomah County Health Department also found that **coal dust from rail transport alone (not including coal dust from a terminal) has potential to result in growth and development problems, heart and lung problems, cancers, and safety related injury and deaths.**

*Multnomah County Health Department, February 2013, The Human Health Effects of Rail Transport of Coal Through Multnomah County, Oregon*

“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.”

*Andy Harris, MD (Oregon Physicians For Social Responsibility, 3/1/13, Physicians Respond to Multnomah County Study: Coal Train Traffic Could Exacerbate Health Issues*

“By shipping millions of tons of coal through Seattle and Vancouver on the backs of mile-long trains, **we are jeopardizing not just the public health, safety, and economic security of this generation, but of many generations to come.** We simply can’t allow our communities and region to become a jumping off point for dirty coal.”

*Julie Strandquist, RN Washington*

“I am a retired Emergency Physician and am very concerned about waiting times for emergency vehicles caused by the proposed increase in coal train traffic. There are several medical conditions that are extremely time sensitive. In certain stroke patients 5 minutes may make the difference between being able to be treated with thrombolytics or not. Thrombolytics in certain stroke patients can reverse devastating neurologic defects. In heart attack victims a delay of minutes can result in heart muscle death. And in major trauma time delays can result in increased blood loss and organ failure. **Please look into the potential delays in reaching a hospital caused by the increased coal train traffic. Literally some people’s lives may hang in the balance...”**

*Eric Luther Schutz MD, partial public comment submitted during scoping for Cherry Point coal export terminal.*