

RECEIVED
OCT 31 2012
Whatcom County P&DS

October 27, 2012

Mr. Randel Perry
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District
Care of GPT/BNSF Custer Spur EIS Co-Lead Agencies
1100 112th Avenue Northeast, Suite 400
Bellevue, WA 98004

Mr. Ted Sturdevant, Director Department of Ecology
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Mr. Tyler Schroeder
Current Planning Supervisor
Whatcom County Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226

EIS SCOPING FOR GATEWAY PACIFIC TERMINAL PROJECT:
COAL DUST AND HUMAN HEALTH

Dear Representatives:

My husband and I live in Birch Bay, a community of about 8000 which lies well within a 10-mile radius of the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal (GPT). Our home faces the Bay and we can see Cherry Point Refinery from our balcony. We have spoken with many people who live close to coal-shipping terminals, people who have to suffer from the dust which is visible on everything and builds up in and on their homes. With the prevailing SW winds in our area, it is a no-brainer that we will have a similar problem with coal dust from GPT. We are seriously concerned about breathing coal dust – particles too small to be seen with the naked eye – and about the ultimate value of our lovely home over time.

Please include an in-depth study of the cumulative health impacts of breathing fugitive coal dust particles that are less than 10 microns in size to include in the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This study should encompass every community with a 3 mile radius of the train tracks, since BNSF openly states that significant coal is lost in every car that carries coal. The coal dust at the terminal created by processing, storage, and shipping will lead to fugitive emissions approximating those of an open pit coal mine and could violate OSHA standards. The 80-acre, 60-foot high piles of coal will release fine particles of dust, which will be carried by prevailing winds inland to all communities. Everyone is at risk to some degree, so we expect your study to cover sub-microscopic analysis as well as wide range geographic coverage.

It is known that Powder River Basin (PRB) coal contains numerous heavy metals, all of which are **biotoxic**: lead, mercury, nickel, cadmium, selenium, manganese, antimony and arsenic, as well as thorium and strontium, which are both radioactive. PRB coal is notorious for being fragile in that it breaks up easily into fine particles. Inhaling coal dust particles **less than 10 microns**, leads to a wide range of health problems: emphysema, chronic bronchitis, asthma, stroke, and cancer. In addition to respiratory effects, coal dust causes many cardiovascular, neurologic, and metabolic disorders and diseases such as heart attacks, strokes, and cancer.

It has been scientifically proven that coal dust particles smaller than 3 microns can be directly inhaled into the lungs, larger, coarser particles can also be inhaled and caught in the hairs and mucous membranes of the nose and bronchi. When a coal dust particle lodges in the lung, it is “walled off” with fibrous tissue. This leads to COPD in time. Every community within 3 miles of the rail line is at risk from fugitive coal dust. In Australia, the world’s largest coal exporter, COPD is their 4th largest killer. When coal communities in the UK were studied by air pollution experts, it was found that children who lived approx. 1 mile from a coal mine site had a 33% greater risk of asthma.

Particles of 10 microns or larger are initially a nuisance, causing a build-up of black dust on all surfaces, but these particles can and do make their way into water supplies where the toxins are dissolved, producing negative health impacts on all living things. Mercury and cadmium have especially pernicious health effects on humans and other aquatic life forms

Certainly, it seems as if the community of Birch Bay is at the high risk for fugitive dust from the terminal, but the coal dust will affect many communities along the rail route. All persons from the Powder River Basin Mine to Cherry Point will be at risk for airborne effects of breathing toxic coal dust. A no-action alternative should be taken, meaning NO COAL, with an alternative of using the terminal to ship commodities other than coal, as outlined in the permits obtained in 1997.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Westland
8293 Fawn Crescent
Blaine, WA 98230
westlandstar@comcast.net