August 27, 2012

Dear Governor Kitzhaber,

As a physician and a policy maker, you understand the importance of disease prevention. We thank you for all that you have accomplished to protect the health of Oregonians. We know you understand the importance of clean air and cleaner, greener and more efficient energy alternatives in the service of pollution prevention. That's why we know that you will understand our objections, as health professionals and public health advocates, to the transportation of coal through Oregon and along/within the Columbia River for export to Asia.

Large multinational coal companies propose to send coal mined in the Powder River Basin by rail and barge through the Pacific Northwest to be loaded onto large ships and exported to Asia. If current proposals are approved, that could result in more than 130 million tons of coal shipped each year. An average of 26 loaded coal trains, each one-mile long (or longer) with over 100 cars propelled by four diesel engines, could pass through Oregon and/or Washington every day.

Our specific, local concerns related to a massive increase in rail and river traffic for coal exports include:

- New, major sources of diesel pollution;
- Coal dust pollution along train tracks, in river corridors and at port sites;
- Traffic delays, including for emergency first responders, at grade-level crossings; and
- Noise pollution.

Our concerns with coal- generated power in Asia include an increased burden of mercury pollution and the greenhouse gas emissions which drive climate change.

Coal trains traveling through our communities, barges, port storage and export facilities, and massive bulk cargo ships on the coast and in the Columbia River will emit significant amounts of diesel particulate pollution. There are robust correlations between these pollutants and cardiovascular and respiratory disease, reproductive health problems, and malignancy, with no "threshold value" for impacts on human health.

We are also concerned about the coal dust which blows off train cars which, in some cases, can be as much as 500 lbs. of coal dust per car per 500 miles travelled. The size and frequency of these trains makes coal dust a public health threat in itself. Coal dust contains mercury, arsenic, and lead, and exposure to coal dust is linked to asthma and lung disease.

Another concern is the potential for delays in emergency response times. For instance, there are four grade-level crossings in Longview, Washington that could detain first

responders for up to 20 minutes each as these long bulk cargo trains pass through town.

Additionally, coal burned abroad in Asia emits nitrous and sulfur oxides, ozone, and heavy metals such as mercury into the air, which will blow back to us on prevailing westerly winds. Recent studies show that a significant amount of the mercury in drinking water and environment comes from coal burned in Asia that returns to the Pacific Northwest via atmospheric currents. In addition, burning large amounts of coal and fossil fuels simply to transport the coal will generate huge amounts of greenhouse gasses that promote and intensify climate change, itself a threat to public health and safety.

Washington and Oregon have taken steps to phase out the use of coal-generated electricity at the PGE Boardman plant and at the Transalta plant in Centralia, which means progress for the health of those living in the Pacific Northwest. Yet the threat of coal exports would undermine this progress we have made.

As health care professionals, providers and public health advocates, we believe the risks to human health from massive coal shipments across our state and through our communities are significant. We want to prevent new sources of morbidity and mortality and increasing costs of health care in Oregon. Therefore, we oppose the proposals related to coal exports and we urge you to do the same.

Specifically, we request that you apply your leadership to prevent the state of Oregon from promoting or facilitating any coal export infrastructure or related transportation in our state. Should you decide to move forward with permitting processes, we ask that you call for and examine a comprehensive Health Impact Assessment (to include cumulative effects) and a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement before any coal export facility or transport is approved by any state agency.

Respectfully,

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