

Dear Governor Kitzhaber,

We know that as a physician and a policy maker, you understand the importance of preventing disease and acting “upstream” to protect the health of Oregonians, and we thank you for all that you have accomplished to protect Oregonians’ health. And 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 ourselves, to transporting coal through Oregon and along the Columbia River for export to Asia.

Large multinational coal companies are proposing to send coal mined in the Powder River Basin by rail through the Pacific Northwest to be loaded onto large ships and exported to Asia. If the current proposed coal export terminals are approved, that could amount to more than 100 million tons of coal shipped each year. That works out to an average of 30 125-car trains per day making round trips. Our specific concerns about this massive increase in rail and river traffic include: skyrocketing diesel pollution; traffic delays, including for emergency first responders, at grade-level crossings; coal dust pollution along train tracks and at the port sites; and noise pollution. Our concerns with coal-generated power in Asia include an increased burden of mercury pollution and greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change.

Coal trains traveling through our communities and the massive bulk cargo ships offshore would 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, about 500 lbs of coal dust per car per 500 miles travelled. The size and frequency of these trains makes this 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 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 then blow back to us on the prevailing westerly winds. Recent studies have shown that a significant amount of the mercury in our local drinking water and environment comes from coal burned in Asia, returning via atmospheric currents. In addition, burning large amounts of coal and fossil

fuels just 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 Pacific Northwesterners. Yet the threat of exporting coal would undermine this progress we have made.

As health care providers and public health advocates, we feel the risks to human health from massive coal shipments across our state and through our communities are significant. We call for a comprehensive Health Impact Assessment, in addition to any required Environmental Impact Statement, addressing these issues along the entire rail corridor before any coal export facility is approved. In the meantime, we strongly oppose exporting coal and urge you to apply your leadership to prevent Oregon from promoting or facilitating any coal export infrastructure or transportation in our state. Please help Oregon lead the way in creating a truly Coal-Free Northwest.

*To add your signature as a health professional to this letter to share your concern with our elected representatives, please contact us today.*