

9/14/15

RE: Public Health Impacts of Coal Exports at the Former Oakland Army Base

Dear Oakland City Council Members:

I am a public health epidemiologist with over 25 years of experience in assessing public health impacts of environmental exposures, including hazardous material spills, pesticides, and air pollution. I am an Alameda County resident and hold a doctorate degree in epidemiology from the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health which I feel especially qualifies me to comment on the potential health impacts of possible coal exports at the Former Oakland Army Base.

I would like to focus my comments on three areas:

1) Coal dust exposures will add pollution to an already disproportionately burdened community suffering long-standing health risks.

Exposure to coal dust is a public health hazard and exposure to West Oakland residents will be adding pollution to a community with already **some of the highest pollution burden in the State** with long-standing health risks. For example, published work conducted by myself and my colleagues showed that areas of West Oakland had **some of the highest rates of emergency room visits for asthma for children in Alameda County**. An accompanying economic analysis showed that the highest costs in the County to society for treating asthma also incurred in this region. Adding coal dust exposures will add pollution to a minority area already suffering from disproportionate pollution effects and will increase health care costs. Children suffering from asthma would be likely to experience a further loss of lung function from inhaling even low levels of coal dust (especially those particles of coal dust less than 10 microns in diameter). The California Environmental Protection Agency has rated parts of the West Oakland area as some of the highest census tracts in the State burdened by pollution. For example, census tract 4017 in West Oakland is rated at the 78th percentile for overall pollution burden and the top percentile for clean-up sites compared to all other CA census tracts.

2) The potential for fire and/or explosion especially during the terminal processing and storage stages, is real, and the onus should be on the developers/owners to show that proper control measures will be implemented to reduce this risk.

Dust explosions and/or fire can occur when coal dust concentrations are high enough, there is an ignition source, and oxygen is present. The owners/developers must show how the suspended dust will be kept at or below 25% of the lower explosive limit (LEL) at all times. Water misting is one of the main control methods for reducing coal dust explosion/fire potential. At the Westshore terminal near Vancouver, British Columbia, which is the largest existing coal export terminal on the West Coast, water costs are approximately \$1.5 million/year. This does not seem like a good investment to be making during a historic drought crisis.

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3) Investing in fossil fuel development/transport at this critical time is bad for public health.

At a time when large institutions such as the University of California are divesting funds from fossil fuel holdings, the timing could not be worse for the City of Oakland to invest in coal transport. This obviously goes against the Council's own resolution (7/17/14) opposing the transport of fossil fuels by rail through the city. **Climate Change has been called the biggest global health threat of the 21st century.** It would be unconscionable for Oakland to support this effort, no matter what the financial gain. Health effects such as increased heat illness and death, increased air pollution and respiratory disease, increased wildfires and deteriorated air quality, drought and effects on water quality, are among only a few of the consequences of continued burning of fossil fuels. The City of Oakland would be complicit in contributing to the climate change crisis with the approval of this facility.

Thank you for letting me outline some concerns with the proposed coal export terminal at the former Oakland Army Base. I hope that the City will decide on the right side of history and not allow this health-damaging facility be approved in Oakland.

Sincerely,



Paul B. English, PhD, MPH

References

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