

Received: 9/23/2015 12:00:00 AM

Commenter:

Organization:

State:

Agency: Surface Transportation Board

Initiative: Tongue River Railroad

Submission Text

Unnamed Female

Missoula, Montana

My comments will focus on the health issues of the increased presence of coal dust and diesel emissions due to the increased train traffic coming through our communities. As a registered nurse, I am concerned about these health issues. The first issue with coal dust is the question of how much of it will escape along the route from mines in Wyoming and Montana to propose export terminals on the West Coast.

What might that coal dust mean for public health? In 2009, a representative from the BNSF Company testified before Federal Review Board. He stated that 645 pounds of coal dust in a loaded coal train escape from each coal train car during a 500-mile trip. There are usually 125 cars per coal train. The BNSF Company claims that it will apply a surfactant that would decrease the coal dust by 85%. Even if this turns out to be the case and BNSF applies this to every coal car, the coal dust loss on 125-car coal train will still be significant and will certainly not be zero.

A health department's report in Oregon stated that railroad companies and the coal industry should have to prove that coal dust coming off the trains will not be a health risk. Coal has been transported via train for decades, yet little research has been done on the potential health effects for people who live near coal train routes. There is enough risk to merit more specific sampling and research about coal dust before any decisions are made about the transportation of uncovered coal cars.

Another risk is the increased diesel emissions. The diesel emission will increase as a result of the increased train traffic due to the exporting of more coal. These increased diesel emissions will be in the air around the railways in our cities due to the idling and travel of the additional trains. There will also be an increase in vehicle emissions that will likely result from increased idling times at the train crossings.

As a health hazard, diesel particulate matter is associated with both pulmonary and cardiovascular issues, including cancers, heart disease, and asthma. Children, teens and the elderly are especially vulnerable. The possible health issues of coal dust and increased diesel emissions are serious ones for Missoulians, as the trains pass through the heart of our downtown neighborhoods.

Thank you.