

Facts about Coal Export

Proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal in Cherry Point, Washington



Cherry Point - Photo by Beth Doglio

The proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal (GPT) would handle 24 million tons of coal annually. Some estimates put that figure as high as 48 million tons per year. The terminal would store up to 2.75 million metric tons of coal and other goods in an open-air 80-acre stockpile. That's more than the entire amount of coal shipped through Western Washington on route to Canada in the first nine months of 2010 (approx. 2.6 million tons).

What's at Stake for Bellingham and Whatcom County

- Coal dust put into the air from moving coal trains would threaten human health, water quality, farmland, fish and wildlife along the entire length of the rail corridor through Bellingham and Whatcom County. Especially vulnerable would be areas near the terminal itself.
- The noise, pollution and traffic congestion from mile-long coal trains rolling through Bellingham's waterfront could undermine the city's \$2 billion Waterfront Redevelopment Project, which seeks to attract new investors, businesses and residents willing to pay premium prices for condominiums, office space and marina slips along Bellingham's spectacular waterfront.

Transporting and Storing Coal is Dirty and Dangerous

- Moving 48 million tons of coal per year would mean an additional eight to nine, mile-and-a-half long coal trains rolling through Bellingham's waterfront *every day*. According to the rail operator, BNSF, coal trains lose as much as 3 percent of their load en route through cities, towns and farmland and across rivers and streams.
- The Westshore coal export terminal at Tsawwassen, south of Vancouver, British Columbia, handles about 21 million tons annually. Residents of Point Roberts, a beachfront community three miles away from the export terminal, complain that coal dust blackens homes, patio furniture, and boats moored in the local marina.
- In Seward, Alaska, years of failure to control terminal dust have led to a lawsuit under the Clean Water Act. In 2010, the state of Alaska fined the railroad company that delivers the coal to the terminal \$220,000 for failing to adequately control dust that dirtied Seward's scenic harbor.



- The Lamberts Point Coal Terminal in Norfolk, Virginia, which ships 28 million tons of coal annually, is legally permitted to release up to 50 tons of coal dust into the air each year. Black grit commonly coats cars, windowsills, and plants in neighboring communities. Soil samples taken throughout the city were found to contain up to 20 percent coal by weight at a site less than 1 kilometer from the docks and 1 percent coal as far as 12 kilometers away.
- Rail operator BSNF recently completed an extensive study on the impact of coal dust on rail lines. The company determined coal dust buildup can prevent water from draining from track beds, which in turn can push steel rails out of gauge and cause derailments. Despite these findings, BNSF decided to leave it up to coal shippers to figure out how to meet new standards to limit coal dust escapement and how to pay for it.



Coal dust. Photo courtesy of Sierra Club

Coal and Public Health



Seward, Alaska Terminal – Photo Courtesy of Sierra Club

- According to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), coal dust has been shown to cause bronchitis, emphysema, and black lung disease in exposed coal workers.
- Mercury and other toxic air pollution produced when China and other Asian nations burn the coal shipped from GPT will end up in the Northwest's air, water and fish. An Oregon researcher estimates that as much as 18 percent of the mercury in Oregon's Willamette River comes from sources overseas, increasingly from China. Mercury pollution is a serious threat to human health with pregnant women and the unborn most vulnerable.

Puget Sound Fish and Wildlife

- The GPT proposal includes a plan to fill-in 141 acres of wetlands.
- According to GPT, the project could impact 12 species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act including Bull trout, Marbled Murrelet, Chinook salmon, Steelhead trout, Coho salmon, Humpback whale, Orcas, Steller sea lion, Leatherback sea turtle, Bocaccio, Canary rockfish, and Yelloweye rockfish.
- The GPT site is directly in the path of a once robust herring grounds, the Cherry Point Pacific herring. These herring are the primary food source for endangered spring Chinook, once the primary food source for imperiled orcas in Puget Sound.

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