

**OREGON NURSES ASSOCIATION
ACTION REPORT
Coal Exports through Oregon**

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Supported by Cabinet on Health Policy

Recommended Actions:

ONA express full support for Governor Kitzhaber's statement of April 19, 2014 that "it is time to once and for all say NO to coal exports from the Pacific Northwest..." and furthermore, move that ONA calls on Governor Kitzhaber to apply his leadership toward ensuring that any coal export permit applications to Oregon agencies are denied. In addition, ONA will request that Governor Kitzhaber apply his leadership to regional leaders to ensure that coal is not transported through Oregon or along waterways adjacent to Oregon.

Background Information:

According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality website, Ambre Energy, a large multinational coal company, proposes to bring up to 8.8 million tons of coal a year from strip mines in Montana and Wyoming by train to the Port of Morrow in Boardman. The coal would be transferred to barges that would then take the coal down the Columbia River to Port Westward in Clatskanie where coal would be transferred onto ocean-going ships bound for Asia. In addition, up to 18 loaded, uncovered coal trains, each one-mile long or longer with over 100 cars propelled by 4 diesel engines en route to Longview or Bellingham terminals, could pass through the Columbia River Gorge and the Portland metro area. Our specific health and safety concerns related to massive increases in rail and river traffic for coal exports include:

- Coal dust coming from uncovered cars contains heavy metals like mercury, lead, arsenic, and cadmium. Coal dust is a trigger for asthma, and causes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Coal also contains polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, some of which are carcinogenic and are associated with lower IQ and childhood asthma.
- But worse than coal dust from a public health perspective, is diesel exhaust, which causes asthma, heart disease and is a known carcinogen, particularly lung cancer. Substances in diesel exhaust are inhaled down the bronchial tree, where the toxins easily diffuse across the alveolar membranes into the circulatory system.
- For people living within earshot of the tracks, the incessant rumbling of heavy trains, and the piercing whistles, contributes to sleep disorders, hypertension, heart disease, depression, anxiety, and learning disabilities.
- Another concern is the potential for delays in emergency response times. Coal train traffic could disrupt emergency routes. This could cause delays in vital emergency medical treatments. All these safety and health risks are disproportionately visited on those who live near the rail lines.

Our concerns with coal-generated power in Asia result in greenhouse emissions that drive climate change. Coal is a leading contributor to climate pollution and 20% of mercury in waterways in Oregon comes from Asia's coal combustion. Health care professionals must first become informed about the health implications of climate change in order to educate clients and

communities. There is a vital role for nurses in prevention of this looming public health crisis. In accordance with ANA Code of Ethics (Provision 1:34) nurses should be active participants in the development of policies and review mechanisms designed to promote patient safety, reduce the likelihood of errors, and address both environmental systems factors and human factors that present increased risks to patients.

American Nurses Association: Global Climate Change Resolution 2008 recognizes and publicly acknowledges that the challenges we face as a result of global climate change are unprecedented in human history and it is critical that nurses speak out in a united voice and advocate for change on both individual and policy levels.

Implementation:

Written communication to Governor John Kitzhaber voicing concerns of coal exports, including a request to include comprehensive Health and Environmental Impact Statements that examine the health, safety, and climate impacts from cradle to grave. These statements must be evaluated before any coal export facility or transport is approved by any Oregon state agency with cc: to Department of State Lands Director Mary Abrams, Department of Environmental Quality Director Dick Pedersen, and The Honorable John McHugh (Army Corps of Engineers).

Financial Impact:

No additional fiscal impact is anticipated.

References:

The Human Effects of Rail Transport of Coal Through Multnomah County, Oregon: *A Health Analysis and Recommendations for Further Action*. Health Assessment and Evaluation. February 2013

Comments to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Re: *Coyote Island Terminal Project Proposal*, Submitted by Sarah Baessler, Oregon Nurses Association July 2013

ANA. House of Delegates Resolution: *Climate Change*. 2008

American Public Health Association. Policy 20078: *Addressing the Urgent Threat of Global Climate Change to Public Health and the Environment*.