



# Air Quality & Coal Trains

A MESSAGE FROM THE SPOKANE REGIONAL CLEAN AIR AGENCY

## BACKGROUND

**There is a proposal to build and operate** the Gateway Pacific Terminal between Ferndale and Blaine, Washington. The terminal would provide storage and handling of exported and imported dry bulk commodities, including coal. Because the proposed project would likely increase coal transport via rail through Spokane County, the project is of local interest. Spokane Clean Air has prepared this fact sheet to address some of the common questions about the air quality impacts of the additional train traffic should the project move forward, including resources to learn more about the proposed project and public involvement process and timelines.

## Will the increase in train traffic cause Spokane's air quality to become impaired, especially during winter's inversion conditions?

We won't know until Ecology completes the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The number of additional trains, the types of locomotives to be used, and idling times are unknown at this time.

## Is Spokane Clean Air in favor or opposed to the coal transport through Spokane?

As a public agency, we do not take positions for or against projects. We do, however, provide input to reviewing agencies when a proposed project might impact air quality. For this project, our concerns will be sent in a letter to the lead agencies under the public comment/scoping process.

The emissions from the diesel locomotives pose the greatest concern related to health and air quality. Our concerns regarding potential impacts to Spokane's airshed, include:

- 1) Increased diesel emissions that will likely be added to our airshed from the idling and travel of the additional trains; and
- 2) Increased vehicle emissions that will likely result from increased idling at train crossings.

Based on these concerns, Spokane Clean Air will be pushing for the use of the newest and cleanest locomotive engines.

## What is diesel exhaust and why be concerned?

Diesel exhaust is made up on tiny, highly toxic particles that penetrate our lungs and remain there indefinitely to create and/or worsen both heart and lung conditions. Exposure to diesel particles is linked to immediate and long-term health effects. Please refer our Diesel Exhaust & Air Quality fact sheet for more information.

## Is Spokane Clean Air concerned about the coal dust emissions from the uncovered trains?

After reviewing how coal dust is treated once it is loaded, Spokane Clean Air is fairly confident that this will not be an issue for local quality impacts. The potential for coal dust emissions is greatest at the point of loading and unloading, which is not occurring in Spokane County.

## Why isn't Spokane Clean Air regulating coal trains?

Under state law, Spokane Clean Air is limited in its authority and may only regulate stationary sources of air pollution. In our state, the Washington State Department of Ecology regulates mobile sources of air pollution. Train traffic is regulated by the federal government, as it is interstate commerce.

The U.S. EPA regulates emissions from locomotive engines and the U.S. Surface & Transportation Board

regulates railroads, including coal dust emissions. The Surface & Transportation Board has determined that coal dust can undermine the railroad track bed and requires shippers to take measures to control coal dust, such as using a topping agent on the coal to control dust at an 85% or greater efficiency.

## What agencies are involved in reviewing and determining if the proposal can move forward?

Whatcom County, the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) together are conducting the EIS process for the proposed terminal projects and will jointly produce one EIS. Whatcom County and Ecology must follow the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), and the Corps must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Scoping is a preliminary phase of the EIS process when the agencies identify potential adverse impacts to decide what impacts to analyze in the EIS. The three lead agencies are gathering input from other agencies, tribes and the public.

After considering comments, the lead agencies will decide what should be included in the EIS.

The EIS will evaluate the adverse impacts of various alternatives and explores possible mitigation to reduce the impacts.

The lead agencies hosted seven scoping meetings, during which staff was available to answer questions and people could view information about the proposed projects and have opportunities to provide oral or written comments.

A 120-day comment period for the NEPA/SEPA EIS scoping process began Sept. 24, 2012, and ended Jan. 21, 2013. The three agencies have received thousands of comments.

## About Us

Founded in 1969, the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency (Spokane Clean Air) works to achieve and maintain clean air in Spokane County, Washington by administering local, state, and federal air quality laws and regulations.

We carry out our functions of air monitoring and forecasting, air quality permitting, compliance and enforcement, and education and outreach with the support of our member entities: Spokane County and its incorporated cities and towns of Spokane, Spokane Valley, Airway Heights, Cheney, Deer Park, Liberty Lake, Medical Lake, Latah, Millwood, Rockford, Spangle and Waverly.

## Our Authority

The 1967 Washington Clean Air Act (Chapter 70A.15 RCW, formerly 70.94 RCW) authorized counties to activate local air agencies. There are seven local air agencies in the state. Counties that do not have a local air agency fall under the jurisdiction of the Washington State Department of Ecology.

**For more information, call (509) 477-4727 or visit [www.SpokaneCleanAir.org](http://www.SpokaneCleanAir.org).**