COAL'S BURNING ISSUES

• If the Port of Coos Bay becomes a coal export terminal, open-topped coal trains will come through **Eugene** on their way to the coast.

• Coal trains can shed **500 lbs** to a ton of coal dust per car along their route, and each train can have 120 cars.

• Doctors say coal dust from the trains can lead to chronic bronchitis, emphysema, pulmonary fibrosis and environmental contamination through the leaching of **toxic heavy metals**.

• Coal trains average a mile to a mile and half long and can hold up traffic at railroad crossings for 10 to 45 minutes.

• Rock from the Parvin Butte quarry, whose owners were mining without a permit, was slated to be used in the ballast for the Coos Bay Rail Link that would bring the coal to the coast.

• **37%** of Oregon's electricity comes from coal burning and although Oregon's only coal-fired plant will stop burning coal in 2020, power companies import coal-produced electricity.

COAL ONLINE

For more information on the anti-coal train coalition, go to the Coalition to Resist Coal Trains Through Eugene Facebook page at http://wkly.ws/164

For the Sightline Institute's lengthy investigation into coal in the Northwest go to http://wkly.ws/165

For a look at Balance Media's video on coal exports go to http://wkly.ws/f

Schlenker-Goodrich says, "The way to think about the way electricity in the U.S. works at this time is that it relies on huge centralized power plants typically in rural areas." He says the plants create regional haze and smog.

Even with Boardman moving away from coal (though considering natural gas, another fossil fuel, as well as biofuel-burning options) Oregon is still coal-dependent. "Turn on a light bulb in Eugene and it could be from power produced in Montana," Schlenker-Goodrich says.

According to the Oregon Department of Energy, 37 percent of the electricity used in Oregon comes from coal, some from Boardman and some from out-of-state power plants such as Montana's massive Colstrip plant. Recently released EPA data on power plants says Colstrip was the eighth biggest producer of greenhouse gas emissions in 2010, sending out 17,120,416 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. In other words, a light bulb turned on in Eugene might be creating greenhouse gases in Montana, as well as poisoning the wells and lungs of the communities near the plant.

Joe Harwood of the Eugene Water and Electric Board says EWEB gets some of its power from BPA (Bonneville Power Administration), and that "coal makes up makes up 6 percent of EWEB's power resource portfolio." He adds, "EWEB and every other utility in the Northwest that receives BPA power would thus have some coal in their resource mix."

According to EWEB's electric resource portfolio, the utility gets 52 percent of its electricity from BPA, and Harwood says 76 percent of EWEB's power resources come from hydropower. So Eugene isn't using much coal, though it could have tons of coal coming through town.

"There is a lot of pressure on these aging coal-fired power plants and the economics are changing very rapidly," Schlenker-Goodrich says. In addition to many of the older power plants such as Boardman being shut down, new proposals for coal-burning plants are being shelved, and "you have the coal mines saying 'Well we still want to mine this coal and sell it somewhere,'" he says.

That somewhere is Asia, and if the Coos Bay coal export terminal goes through, Oregon will be the route that gets it there.

TRAIN IN VAIN

Boardman burns 3 to 5 million tons of coal per year, according to Stevens. "Compare that to how much coal they want to export, and it's scary," she says.

The Coos Bay proposal calls for the exporting of 6 to 10 million tons a year. That's bad enough for Eugene, but Stevens points out that, while another coal export proposal in Longview, Wash., was claiming it would export 5 million tons a year, it was revealed that coal giant Ambre Energy, through its subsidiary Millennium Bulk Terminals, secretly planned to export 20 to 60 million tons of coal a year from the proposed terminal, with at least 20 coal trains a day, moving slowly, holding up traffic, spewing diesel and coal dust, according to Stevens. She says the heavy weight of coal trains means they use a high amount of diesel.

There are five other proposed Northwest coal terminals in addition to Longview. Terminals have been proposed in Bellingham and Grays Harbor in Washington, and in Oregon there are proposals for terminals at ports in St. Helens and Boardman and, of course, Coos Bay.

The Boardman proposal, like Longview, is through Australian coal giant Ambre Energy. In addition to Ambre, fellow coal mega-corps Arch Coal (which owns Millennium with Ambre), Peabody Coal and Cloud Peak Energy are working to export coal, or already do, mainly from the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming. Currently that coal is exported through three terminals in Canada. Power River Basin coal is in demand for its low sulfur content. Climate change activist Bill McKibben has called the basin "one of earth's great carbon bombs."

Peabody reportedly has entered into a large coal export contract with the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal project north of Bellingham. Just who has entered into the coal contract with Coos Bay remains unknown, thanks to the nondisclosure agreement. Martin Callery, chief commercial officer for the Port of Coos Bay, says such agreements are common in the transportation industry, from rail to marine to trucking. Because there's a lot of competition, the companies don't want their competitors to know what they're planning, Callery says.

"I don't think people realized it was going to come this far south," says Eugene activist Pettygrove. "We thought that the port's not deep enough, and the rail link was not up until this year. I really think that them fixing the rail link was done to prepare for this project."

Coal opponents speculate that the companies looking to open up terminals in Oregon are the same ones working on the Washington proposals — Arch, Ambre and Peabody — and are hedging their bets in case those terminals don't pan out. Cloud Peak Energy, a top exporter of coal through Canada, has several subsidiaries in Oregon: Kennecott Coal Sales, Northern Coal Transportation, Prospect Land and Development and Western Minerals.

Callery says that within the next 90 to 120 days, the Port of Coos Bay will enter into a property-purchase option agreement with "Project Mainstay," at which point the coal company's name could become known. The port and "Project Mainstay" are currently in the middle of six months of "due diligence" on the project, he says, which includes everything from looking at port capacity to rail-line capacity. The port also owns the rail line, called the Coos Bay Rail Link (CBRL).

Callery says a "dictating factor" in how much coal would be exported from Coos Bay is the "volume of bulk commodity via the rail system" or, in other words, how many unit trains (that travel from start to finish as one unit) the CBRL can handle. There is no legal limit on how long a freight train can be in the U.S.; they are limited only by their weight and what can pull them. Coal trains often have four diesel-spewing locomotives, two at each end of the train.

Project Mainstay is currently doing a rail capacity study, Callery says. He says the port didn't choose the largest project, it chose what it considered the best one. Another proposal, "Project Glory," which the port commission didn't choose, called to export 26 million metric tons of coal.

Callery says coal isn't the only commodity Project Mainstay is considering. It would also transport iron ore and mineral products. "There would be a significant number of jobs" at the terminal, the rail carrier and in the maritime industry, Callery says. The port's export of wood products, long one of its past mainstays, has dropped from five million tons a year to million and half, and jobs dropped with that. But employment numbers are unknown until Mainstay completes its due diligence, he says.

BLACK LUNGS

Maps indicate that the coal would be loaded onto trains at the Powder River Basin mines in Montana and Wyoming, taken through Montana into Washington, then through the Columbia Gorge, down the rail line following the I-5 corridor and into Eugene, where the trains would switch rails onto the newly fixed and reopened CBRL.

The CBRL moves west from Eugene toward Florence, then down the coast through Reedsport to Coos Bay, crossing through forests, past towns and over lakes and rivers on its way. Stevens of the Sierra Club says that for humans, the danger from coal dust is in its mercury, arsenic and lead, which could lead to lung cancer and asthma as well as health issues stemming from the small particulate matter that gets into the lungs.

Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics has been working for years on health issues related to train traffic along River Road and in the Trainsong area. Diesel exhaust, like coal dust, is bad for your health. It releases carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, nitrogen oxides and polyaromatic hydrocarbons and their derivatives, Arkin says.

Whatcom Docs, a group of 170 doctors organized against the coal-export terminal in Bellingham, say that diesel particulate matter is associated with increased risk of cancer, pulmonary inflammation and increased heart attacks in adults, and increased asthma and hospital emissions in children.

The doctors say the coal dust from the trains can lead to chronic bronchitis, emphysema, pulmonary fibrosis and environmental contamination through the leaching of toxic heavy metals.