

COAL BATTLE HEATING UP IN EUGENE

Coos Bay is one of six Northwest ports vying to export coal to Asia. Thanks to its position on the railroad system, Eugene is one of the many cities in Oregon and Washington facing mile-and-a-half-long coal trains chugging through town, leaving coal dust and diesel fumes in their wake. The coal train issue has been the topic of a recent Eugene City Club debate, will be the subject of a City Council vote and will be the center of a “Coal Hard Truth” forum on July 16, as well as a peaceful protest July 12.

Uncovered coal trains, which can shed 500 pounds of coal dust per car over the course of a haul, are an environmental, health and even a safety issue. On July 9, the Eugene City Council postponed a vote on opposing the trains until July 16.

At a City Club forum on July 6, Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics and Ivan Maluski of the Sierra Club discussed the threats these coal trains pose to clean water and clean air in Eugene. Arkin’s warnings ranged from the diseases caused by coal dust in the lungs to the sheen of dust that could spread from the tracks, covering cars, farms and even seep into your cold pitcher of Ninkasi.

The health dangers are not limited to the coal dust. Diesel particulates from the engines that haul the trains — sometimes as many as five, Arkin said — can get into the lungs of people living and working near the tracks. Arkin said there are 27 schools and 14 daycare facilities within 2 miles of the tracks that would be affected by the dust and particulates. She pointed out that on a bad air day, when wood fires and other burning would be stopped, the trains would continue to release air toxics.

The Port of Coos Bay and other parties interested in pursuing the port as a coal export center were invited to the City Club forum but declined to attend, citing a public records case the Sierra Club is involved in with the port.



Last week a train bearing coal from Wyoming derailed while crossing a suburban bridge in Chicago, crushing a car below the bridge and killing a couple heading out to celebrate on July 4. On July 2 a 125-car coal train also carrying Powder River Basin coal derailed in Washington State. The wreck spilled about 900 tons of coal. Studies by the BNSF railroad show that coal dust building up under tracks can lead to derailment.

For those who missed the City Club discussion, the Coal Hard Truth forum will take place at 6:30 pm July 16 at the Eugene Public Library. Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky of Columbia Riverkeeper says this forum is one of almost 30 that have taken place across the Northwest. The forums “attempt to bring as many stakeholders to the table as possible,” she says. The Eugene forum hopes to call attention to the upcoming vote on Councilor Alan Zelenka’s proposed City Council resolution against coal trains, which says: “Allowing

coal trains to pass through our city is not compatible with the city’s efforts to improve air quality, enhance public health and promote local food production.”

Zimmer-Stucky says she will facilitate the forum, which will include Arkin, Jordan Chestnut of No Coal Eugene, Bethany Cotton of Greenpeace’s Quit Coal campaign and a local farmer.

If the resolution gets approved, the city would look into whether it could use state or federal laws to block the coal trains from coming through town.

The council vote is also currently scheduled for July 16. There will be a 5:30 pm council work session, and no public comment on the resolution is scheduled for that meeting. Check EW’s blog for updates.

On Thursday, July 12, Beyond Toxics and No Coal Eugene will have a peaceful demonstration at the Eugene Train Yard, 1035 Bethel Drive starting at 10 am. — *Camilla Mortensen*

TRADING EVICTION NOTICES: FEDS V. OCCUPY

The federal government’s General Services Administration delivered a letter to Occupy Eugene on July 10 denying the group’s permit application to remain at the old Federal Courthouse on 7th Avenue. The group was given until 3 pm July 11 to leave the site. In response, the Occupiers handed the feds an eviction notice of their own.

“They don’t want people there 24 hours a day,” Lauren Regan of the Civil Liberties Defense Center said of the GSA. “We’ve lost our right to free speech between the hours of 10 pm and 7 am.” The CLDC represents Occupy Eugene as well as other free speech and environmental protesters.

Occupy Eugene has had an outpost at the old Federal Courthouse since May 1. The site has hosted sign-making parties and a medical tent. At the time, Eugene’s Homeland Security offered OE a 60-day permit, which has now expired.

The group applied for a 30-day permit for the month of July on a 24-hour basis for a “never-ending protest involving event organization, sign-making and outreach.”

The GSA turned the permit down, citing the request for a 24-hour presence. The GSA also writes in its letter to OE that it has an interest in maintaining an “aesthetically pleasing area.”

“Our taxes paid for the federal government, so we have a right to use the property responsibly, and I don’t feel that this is an irresponsible use of the property,” Occupier Christopher Albaugh says. “We’ve maintained thoroughfare, we’ve maintained that people can still get into business, but we are active and present.”



CHAUN BENJAMIN OF THE GSA GIVES OCCUPY EUGENE NOTICE

PHOTO BY SHANNON FINNELL

After the GSA’s Director of Service Centers Division Chau Benjamin presented the Occupiers with copies of the letter, he refused to give reporters his name until leaving the Occupy outpost and making a phone call, saying he had to go through proper channels.

In response to the GSA, Occupier Peter Grotticelli handed the feds an eviction notice of their own, which regretfully informed the federal government that he and other anarchists do not recognize the 1855 secession from the coast tribes of Oregon, which would legitimate the government’s presence in “this charming square stone structure on this property.” The letter continues, “We must therefore ask that you allow

our autonomous collective to occupy the structure, and that your armed agents fuck off back to Area 51.”

Regan says, “Washington, D.C., basically told Eugene that anyone that wants to exercise their First Amendment rights on the plaza, even for an hour, will need to get a permit.” She says people will face arrest for “simply exercising First Amendment rights in broad daylight.”

The plaza in question is known as the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza and is frequent site for protests, rallies and sign waving. Several Occupiers say they are willing to risk arrest rather than leave the outpost. — *Shannon Finnell and Camilla Mortensen*