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PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Bonnie Meltzer is a mission to both educate and rally against proposed coal exports. She and her husband have founded the North Portland Coal Committee.

## Toxic Coal Blues

continued from front

garden that sits a mere five blocks from one of the railroad lines that would transport coal.

Because coal shipments by rail are not covered by tarps or other enclosures, she expects coal dust to invade her space.

Meltzer and her husband are on a mission to both educate and rally against the coal exports. They have founded the North Portland Coal Committee.

On Saturday, they led a large 'No Coal' demonstration at the railroad cut where it crosses Lombard Street in north Portland. It was a chance for neighbors to voice their objections.

Coal shipments, she said, will change the entire environment of Portland, which prides itself as a city that is clean and green.

Resident Tom Caccamo, 66, is also concerned about the health risks.

"I'm old, so this really isn't going to affect me that much," he said. "But it will affect the breathing of the younger people."

Although he said he isn't sure about the affect of global warming on our planet, he said he is certain the chemicals produced by burning coal will drastically affect the United States and the health of the planet as a whole.

Supporters of coal exports point to an estimate by the Energy Policy Research Foundation which claims increased U.S. coal exports could bring between \$2 billion and \$6 billion per year to the suffering U.S. economy. The three projects proposed along the Columbia River near Portland represent around \$1 billion in private investment.

Permanent jobs would be created tied to the transportation of the coal, and to load the carbonized material onto ocean-going vessels, however, the jobs to build the export terminals would be temporary.

"The big issue is how many jobs

we will lose," Meltzer said. "What about the jobs in agriculture? In fishing? Fisheries and sport fishing is a billion dollar industry in Oregon and that will be lost."

Tourism will also be affected, she said. "People come here because of the culture, because we are clean and green. They come here because of who we are, but this will change who we are. There will be an identity crisis for nothing."

According to Physicians for Social Responsibility, there is a need for increased efforts to assess the health and environmental impacts from the coal exports.

As a group of health care providers and public health advocates, we understand the significant risks to human health posed by massive coal shipments on our rivers and through our communities, said Merritt.

Currently, the organization, with more than 135 physicians, has asked that the health impacts be identified before proceeding with any permits.

The shipments will affect everyone, from the mines, to the rail lines and the barge lines, to recipients of the coal in Asia, she said. "And then when the coal burns, it blows back to us, which is why there will be high levels of mercury in rivers and in our fish."

There will be an immediate local impact and dramatic long term impact for everybody, she said. "I think people are learning about the threat now."

The Portland City Council is expected to weigh-in on the issue during a meeting on Sept. 19.

"I hope the community will come out in strong support for their communities and their health," said Merritt.

Meltzer agreed. She said, "For me personally, I want this issue to be resolved so I can get back to my studio and garden, but my serious hope is that for Portland and the Northwest, the cleanest area in the country, is not ruined."

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