

Long Beach Press Telegram

A step backward in port pollution

By Tim Carmichael and

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Guest Columnists

Saturday, March 26, 2005 - Residents of Long Beach are the unfortunate recipients of some of the highest levels of air pollution in the state. The amount of air pollution blowing inland every day from the Long Beach/Los Angeles ports is astoundingly equal to the amount of air pollution generated daily by three million cars.

Despite knowing this, City Council just lost a major opportunity to protect Long Beach residents' health from such dangerous air pollution. The City Council's Port air quality policy, approved last week, does not contain the basic pollution controls on ships, trucks and trains necessary to protect public health, which were unanimously approved by a neighboring Port of Los Angeles task force.

USC researchers tell us that children in Long Beach face some of the highest levels of asthma and permanent damage to lung development in the region. Diesel pollution from the ports' trains, ships, cargo conveyors and trucks poses significant risks to local residents, including cancer and premature death.

Levels of diesel pollution are on the rise. Cancer clusters reported by USC to be statistically significant in the Long Beach area should alarm us all. The statewide costs associated with these health effects, both direct health care costs and indirect costs such as missed work and school, are estimated annually to be in the billions.

The City Council's new plan will actually increase diesel pollution and its resultant health effects in Long Beach. Next door, at the Los Angeles Port, efforts are underway to establish a stricter plan with cost-effective controls proven to reduce air pollution to 2001 levels. The Long Beach Port's "plan" contains no such controls. What are in reality one port and one atmosphere will soon be governed by two different plans simply because they are situated under two different political jurisdictions.

Long Beach residents draw the short end of the stick, because the Long Beach plan allows for higher levels of air pollution. Under the Los Angeles plan, fewer of the dirtiest ships, trucks and trains will be able to pull into the Los Angeles Port. Where will these dirtiest ships, trucks and trains likely seek safe harbor? You guessed it. The Long Beach port.

The health of residents should be the foremost consideration. Long Beach should follow Los Angeles' lead and put in place real measures to reduce port air pollution. For example, the city can require all ships to "plug-in" to electric power instead of running harmful fumes from their engines while at dock. The city can also require ships and trains, as Los Angeles will, to use low sulfur fuel.

Los Angeles chose to look at the best available options by convening a balanced task force of diverse stakeholders; Long Beach should do the same. Residents are tired of breathing filthy air. City leaders can and should do more.

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