NWCAA seeks analysis of proposed export terminal’s effects on local air quality

Agency comments on scope of environmental impact statement

The Northwest Clean Air Agency submitted its comments today on the scope of the environmental impact statement for the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal and related BNSF Custer Spur project.

Scoping is part of the environmental impact statement process, which is being led by Whatcom County, the Washington Department of Ecology and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The three agencies will consider scoping comments to determine the range of alternatives and issues to be studied in the environmental review.

NWCAA’s comments focus on gathering information to support the agency’s dual role for any large, complex industrial facility that emits air pollutants in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties, the agency’s jurisdiction. NWCAA is responsible for:

- Evaluating and making a decision on an air quality permit for construction and operation of the proposed terminal.
- Protecting and improving overall air quality in the three-county area.

“This is a very emotional issue for a lot of people, but it is important for us to remain neutral and engage in a robust and thorough EIS process,” said NWCAA Executive Director Mark Asmundson. “Our job during scoping is to ask the right questions.”

Some potential sources of air pollution for which NWCAA is seeking analysis include:

- Construction and operation of the proposed terminal and rail spur and handling of any commodities.
- Windblown coal dust at the terminal.
- Emissions from smoldering coal piles.
- Emissions from trains and ships serving the terminal and any commodities they handle.
- Vehicles idling at rail crossings.
- Backup power generation.

NWCAA also is requesting analysis of the potential effects on the three-county area of specific air pollutants from coal burned in Asia if the terminal is built compared to if it isn’t built. A consideration of that analysis would be whether the coal would be exported from another location.

The agency is not seeking an analysis of the local effects of global climate change caused by the overseas combustion of coal shipped through the proposed terminal because local effects of global climate change can’t be tied to any specific source of greenhouse gases.
NWCAA crafted its scoping comments based on information presently available. The environmental impact statement will help NWCAA carry out its responsibilities, but the agency would seek much greater detail from project proponents during the permitting process. Any permit decision the agency makes would be based on laws, facts and science.

“Helping the Corps, Ecology and Whatcom County shape the environmental impact statement is essential to our ability to do our work,” Asmundson said. “We’ll be looking carefully at the draft EIS when it comes out.”

More information:
Northwest Clean Air Agency website: [www.nwcleanair.org](http://www.nwcleanair.org)
Scoping comments: [www.nwcleanair.org/pdf/misc/GPTScopingLtr.pdf](http://www.nwcleanair.org/pdf/misc/GPTScopingLtr.pdf) (2 MB)

About the Northwest Clean Air Agency is the regulatory agency responsible for ensuring compliance with federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources, the agency offers services that deal with asbestos, business assistance, climate change, indoor air quality, outdoor burning and wood stoves and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at [www.nwcleanair.org](http://www.nwcleanair.org).

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