

Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice

Centro de Acción Comunitaria v Justicia

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Field Briefing the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on Air Pollution Challenges for California's Inland Empire

Chairwoman Boxer, Honorable Members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on this important issues.

My name is Penny Newman, Executive Director for the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice. CCAEJ is one of the oldest and most accomplished environmental justice organizations in the nation having begun our work in 1978 as a small neighborhood group fighting for the cleanup of California's top priority Superfund site, the Stringfellow Acid Pits. We will be celebrating our 30 years of working with communities of the Inland Valleys to improve the health, quality of life, and well-being of all our families.

Southern California is facing a critical health crisis. One that we can't inoculate against, change our habits like stop smoking, or exercise more to improve. The health threat comes from the vary activity that we depend upon to keep us alive—breathing.

- Southern California air quality remains the worst in the nation, posing a major health concern for almost 17 million residents in the region.
- The state Air Resource Board estimates that air pollution (PM 2.5) in the South Coast Air Basin is responsible annually for up to 5,400 premature deaths, 2,400 hospitalizations, and 980,000 lost work days.
- 140,000 Children in Southern California have asthma and respiratory problems largely due to air pollution.
- Over 70% of the airborne cancer risk in Southern California is directly attributed to diesel fueled engines in the basin.

Prompted by these startling statistics, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) have called upon Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and President George Bush to issue a State of Emergency for the area.

For the communities of the Inland Valleys these statistics have special significance. Geologic and meteorologic factors make our area the center of the accumulation of this pollution. As coastal winds blow pollution from the Los Angeles and Orange county areas it is trapped by our surrounding mountains where it sits and bakes creating a toxic brew of pollution. As a result San Bernardino has the highest levels of ozone pollution in the nation. Riverside County holds the record for having the highest levels of Particulate matter pollution known as PM₁₀ (Particulate Matter 10 microns or less). While the health risk on a region wide basis is unacceptable, the most severe impacts are concentrated in those communities closest to the sources.

It is in this setting that the decisions to make the movement of goods with its reliance on heavily polluting ships, trucks, and trains, the economic engine for southern California has been made. The rapid growth and convenient location to freeways, airports or rail lines make the Inland Valleys of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties prime locations for industrial facilities, warehouses and distribution centers-- without regard to the incompatibility with existing communities. Also ignored is the health threat posed to local residents. Planning strategies and the drive for economic growth have led local agencies to disregard existing problems such as air pollution, traffic congestion, water contamination or consideration of the rural nature or life styles of existing neighborhoods affected by their decisions. The outcome of poor public policies and lack of appropriate planning has created a situation where homes are next to polluting industries; where diesel trucks crowd residential streets threatening the safety of our children; where neighbors can't use their backyards because of overwhelming noise or odors. This concentration of truck and rail activity has also resulted in the area being designated as a diesel "hot spot" by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) with a cancer risk of over 1500 in a million. The result is an overall deterioration of the air, water, and quality of life— dramatically affecting the health and lives of local residents.

While we often look at the impacts on a regional basis, health researchers have demonstrated that a higher health risk is experienced the closer one gets to the diesel source. The concentration of diesel dependant facilities in communities already at risk disregards this fact. Economic development strategies and local land use decisions influence the levels of pollution to which specific communities are exposed, too often resulting in disproportionate levels of risk for low-income neighborhoods and Communities of Color. Increases in community exposure can lead to increased rates of disease and negative impacts on public health. More than 45 studies conducted by various investigators between 1967 and 1993 examined the role of race and income level in exposure to environmental hazards, and found disparate impacts in the great majority of cases studied (87 percent and 74 percent, respectively).

One such heavily impacted community is the unincorporated community of Mira Loma in Riverside County.

Mira Loma has the highest levels of particulate pollution in the nation.¹

Mira Loma has the 4th worst particulate pollution in the world only after Jakarta, Indonesia; Calcutta, India; and Bangkok, Thailand²

In recent years, environmental health researchers have firmly established the linkage between air pollution exposure and a range of negative health outcomes, including slowed lung growth rates in children (Gauderman et al Cohort C, Cohort D papers), exacerbation of existing respiratory disease (McConnell et al EHP bronchitis/asthmatic paper), increased absences from school due to respiratory illness (Gilliland et al CHS absences paper), and increased mortality. Both gaseous and particulate pollutants have been implicated in health investigations, with increasing attention being focused recently on the toxicity of particulate pollution, both for the physical size and chemical nature of the particles inhaled each day. The California Air Resources Board estimates that more than 2400 people die prematurely due directly to air pollution from the movement of products and goods.

The impact of air pollution on children's respiratory health, in particular asthma, is a significant problem in Southern California. A recent survey in California found that nearly 700,000 children ages 6-17 suffer from asthma symptoms; one in five African-American children in California has been diagnosed with asthma. (CHIS) That same survey finds that in Southern California, the highest asthma symptom prevalence in children ages 0-17 is found in San Bernardino County (13.9%), (CHIS). Air pollution is a significant problem for the target communities of the Inland Valley.

The findings from the USC Children's Health Study demonstrating the affects of air pollution upon lung function are particularly frightening for our area. The Study found *that Mira Loma children had the weakest lung function and slowest lung growth of all children studied in southern California.*

Another analysis that drew upon data from the same USC Children's Health Study, ranked children living in Mira Loma as the most likely to develop asthma, other respiratory diseases *and* have stunted lung growth. The study found that children living within 500 meters of a freeway (approximately a third of a mile) have substantial deficits in lung function by the time they reach age 18. Of all children studied

¹ South Coast Air Quality Management District, "Multiple Air Toxics Exposure Study in the South Coast Air Basin" (MATES II Study), March 2000.

² World Health Organization, as cited by California Public Interest Research Group, CalPIRG, Citizens' Agenda, Vo. 13, No. 3; pg 4, Fall 1997. (The industrialization of China has now created many communities with high levels of PM pollution. While our levels have not gone down, levels in a number of communities in China have risen.

throughout southern California, children in Mira Loma and Riverside had the poorest lung function, and as a result the greatest risk for developing respiratory and cardiovascular diseases later in life.

But disease risk caused by particulate matter pollution is not limited to children. A recent study by the University of Washington found that women over the age of 50 living in highly polluted areas around the United States (including Mira Loma and Riverside) have more than double the chance of developing heart disease and dying from it, compared with women living in cleaner air regions. Again, the study found a strong correlation between particulate pollution and heart disease.

While the science is clear; the documentation of pollution levels is substantial; and suggested solutions have been proposed—local officials continue to place industrial warehouses, truck terminals and railyards next to the homes, schools and parks of these communities ignoring the severe health impacts those decisions inflict upon the families in the area. Inland Valley officials are looking to the Goods Movement as the economic hope for the future. As a result, rail yards, intermodal facilities and trucks have multiplied bringing the pollution closer to existing homes and schools. Adding insult to injury, BNSF Rail road has put forward an offer to buy the neighborhood's only park, so that the facility can expand.

Suggested actions that would lessen the impact are routinely ignored. For example, it has been recognized that by providing a buffer zone of 1,000-1,500 feet between a diesel source (road, warehouse, railyard) and homes, schools, and parks, we reduce the health risk where people live. Yet, there are currently proposals being approved that place these polluting facilities directly next to the fence lines of homes. While SCAG has acknowledged the severity of the health crisis in its call for a State of Emergency, it is considering an Inland Port facility in Mira Loma.

The Union Pacific rail road auto distribution facility in Mira Loma, is located next to Jurupa Valley High School. Separating the railyard from the athletic field of the school is the street the hundreds of trucks use to pick up their load each day. This close proximity to the diesel spewing trucks creates a high health risk for the students. A simple action of closing this southern gate and using the northern gate would reduce significantly the pollution these students are exposed to. Yet, Union Pacific has refused to implement this small mitigation, because it would be inconvenient to its tenants. It is puzzling to me why a corporation would not take easy measures that they know would reduce its impact upon the health of the children of our community.

The anticipated three-to five fold increase in the movement of goods through southern California will compound further adverse health outcomes. Solutions being offered by officials at the ports pose greater increase in the deadly diesel pollution for Inland Valley communities. One solution offered to address port pollution is to utilize rail instead of trucks with the assumption that trucks pollute more than locomotives per

number of containers hauled. Again what is overlooked is that containers would be transported on an expanded rail system while more containers would be still be hauled by an expanded trucking system, the widened freeways. The goal is to maximize both rail and truck transportation modes in order to handle the anticipated expansion of the freight hauling industry.

For the Inland Valleys the promotion of an expanded rail system is particularly troublesome since it depends on the development of an "Inland Port." Since there isn't room at the ports to sort and distribute the containers of goods, the goods would be directly moved from the ships to the rail cars and hauled to the Inland Port. Here the goods would be sorted and thousands of trucks would converge to pick up loads for distribution. One of the leading locations under consideration is at the Space Center in Mira Loma.

To expand an industry that is currently killing people without addressing the current health crisis is criminal. The message to residents is clear—the health and well being of our families does not count; our neighborhoods are expendable.

Many promises are being made to address pollution associated with the expansion of Goods Movement, but there is little reason to believe any of it. Responsibility for action is passed from one jurisdiction to another. Local government points to the state for responsibility; the state points to federal government, and in turn they point back to local government and sanctity of local land use decisions. With all the finger pointing NO ONE is doing anything to address this critical situation. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is nowhere in the discussions. The National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee was recently asked to prepare recommendations regarding how to address the health crisis surrounding the Goods Movement. Not one community person from southern California has been appointed to this study committee, even though I personally have volunteered and traveled to Washington DC for the first face-to-face meeting at my own expense. It is difficult to understand how comprehensive recommendations can arise from the committee if the major geographic area hit hardest by this industry has no voice. Clearly the recommendations will have little credibility if those most directly and most significantly impacted are silenced from the discussions.

Since the trucking, railroad and shipping industries are primarily regulated by federal rules, the federal government holds special importance and must step in to address this growing problem. Instead we are engaged in a hectic discussion on how to increase the movement of goods by 3-5 fold. Our communities will not survive that onslaught.

While ignorance regarding the health implications of exposure to diesel exhaust could be claimed many years ago, the emerging scientific information brought forth by the South Coast AQMD, researchers at USC and UCLA and the hundreds of other

scientific studies generated on diesel, clearly show the horrific health impacts from constant, high levels of diesel exhaust. And yet, the federal government is absent and state agencies appear impotent. Local government seems hypnotized by the promise of jobs and economic growth and ignores the deadly consequences. In many cases local government directly benefits financially from the destruction of our targeted communities. Just as federal intervention was necessary to correct the violations of civil rights occurring in the 1960's, intervention is warranted to correct the immoral land use decisions being made in southern California. If our communities are to survive, such intervention is demanded.

Let's be very clear—the continuing practice of placing these polluting facilities in low-income communities of color is institutional racism in its most obvious form. On behalf of the target communities, struggling families and sick children of our area, we appeal to you, Senator Boxer to begin the process of correcting this deadly injustice.

Thank you.