PORT SAN ANTONIO: STATEMENT ON AIR QUALITY

Spring 2014
Centro por la Justicia
Southwest Worker Union
Committee for Environmental Justice Action
**UPDATE** As a result of SWU & CEJA’s organizing, a city ordinance was passed in the Fall of 2014 with the support of Council District 2 and South San Antonio ISD Board of Trustees. Our work resulted in ‘No Through Truck’ traffic street signs along Quintana Rd, followed by Port SA’s stronger warnings for business whose trucks leave the East Kelly Rail Yard and an ordinance that tickets 18-wheeler truck drivers passing through the Quintana neighborhood.

Southwest Workers Union (SWU) and the Committee for Environmental Justice Action (CEJA) has deep concerns regarding activities at the Port San Antonio and the Port’s lack of meaningful partnerships with local community residents. For over a decade, local residents have worked to ensure that their concerns about environmental integrity and community health have been heard and have advocated for proactive solutions to address problems regarding activities at the Port San Antonio and the Port’s lack of meaningful partnerships with local community residents. Most importantly, the community neighboring Port San Antonio has consistently demanded transparency and open access to participate as equals in decisions affecting the lives of their families, their future and their neighborhood.

The Port disrupts the lives of its neighbors along Quintana Road and 36th Street, and is subjecting the surrounding community to health and safety risks. Specifically, neighbors has observed an alarming increase in the traffic using the Port facility as well as increased activity in the rail yard. Several risk assessments from similar rail yard ports have found significant health risks for nearby communities, such as West Oakland, CA, Roseville, CA, Commerce, CA and Baltimore, MD. The Quintana Road neighborhood is currently at risk because of Port San Antonio activities, and if the growth in hydraulic fracturing in the Eagle Ford Shale Play continues, the risks have the potential to increase significantly.

Environmental Racism describes the reality that hazardous waste dumps, polluting industries and military installations are disproportionately sited in low-income and people of color communities. The cumulative effects of multiple sources of contamination in these neighborhoods continue to damage our environment and health. This community bears the burden of eight decades of toxic activity at Kelly Air Force Base, including one of the largest chlorinated solvent plumes in the country, is the home of the Tropicana Refinery superfund site, is crisscrossed by 3 major highways and is forced to deal with the daily pollution and noise from the aircraft flights and maintenance.

**Trucks:**

Heavy trucks are used to transport materials in and out of the Port but it is unacceptable to let them disrupt the health and safety of our community. Trucks have been frequently seen leaving the port through the Quintana Road neighborhood.

*Port traffic could increase by nearly 300 percent as a result of increased capacity at the East Kelly Railport.*
If railcars are processed at maximum capacity (20,000 railcars per year), this will mean an average of 55 railcars per day, and, 220 trucks per day departing the facility (440 trucks round trip). If trucks operate 24 hours per day, this translates to over 9 trucks per hour moving through the community.

**Air impacts from trucks**

- Trucks release diesel emissions when driving, but trucks also spend long periods sitting in line with their engines running, or idling. Community residents often report health impacts from truck emissions. Even idling can cause negative respiratory and cardiovascular problems for people in their homes. A frequent concern in communities near ports is that truck traffic and idling nearby induces asthma attacks.  
- Large trucks and machinery – used to transport shipments from trains to trucks and vice versa – burn diesel that deteriorates the local air quality. Diesel engines release particulate matter (PM\textsubscript{10} and PM\textsubscript{2.5}), nitric oxides (NO\textsubscript{x}), sulfates (SO\textsubscript{2}), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
- Diesel is responsible early death, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), cardiovascular illness, asthma and other physical ailments for people living nearby.  
- VOCs react with sunlight and heat to become Ozone, which creates major respiratory problems for people who have to breathe it.

In 2013, the American Lung Association gave Bexar County an F for its poor ozone quality in its State of the Air report. This will become worse if nothing is done. What’s more, San Antonio’s ozone levels are so high as a result of the increase in industrial activity in town and in the region that it risks being designated a nonattainment area by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

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• A health impact assessment of the Port of Oakland in Oakland, California
determined that 1 heavy-duty diesel truck released 0.695 grams/vehicle-mile of
particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter (PM$_{2.5}$).\(^8\)

• **Truck traffic entering and departing Port San Antonio at full capacity is estimated to release 305.8 grams/veh-mi of PM$_{2.5}$ every day.**

• **Emissions from the increased in Port truck traffic is added burden to the already polluted neighborhoods. Heavy trucks on the neighboring interstates significantly contribute to diesel emissions in the neighborhood.**

*Trains:*

• Trains traveling at high speeds can derail and cause disasters. A train carrying crude oil through the Canadian town of Lac-Megantic derailed this summer, exploded and killed 47 people, destroying half of the town in the process.

• In 2004, at least 21 derailments happened in San Antonio, including a major chlorine spill that killed 3 people.\(^9\),\(^10\)

• Trains also use diesel, are often old machinery, and release high levels of PM and NOx that makes people sick.\(^2\)

*Noise:*

• The use of trucks, trains and other heavy machinery increases noise levels in the community and negative impacts health and daily lives. Noise increases stress, interferes with sleep, and can affect the health of nearby residents.\(^11\)

• High noise levels have been also shown to interfere with school performance among students.\(^12\) There are at least 18 schools in the 2 miles east of Port San Antonio that trucks must drive near to access the freeways (Figure 1).

*Street safety:*

• Dramatic increase of heavy truck traffic makes communities where children play and residents enjoy time at their homes unsafe and stressful.

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\(^8\) UC Berkeley Health Impact Group (UCBHIG), *Health Impact Assessment of the Port of Oakland,* University of California, Berkeley, CA, March 2010. 


• In other communities, increased truck traffic related to fracking has led to dramatic increases in accidents that place the communities through which the trucks drive in real danger.\textsuperscript{13}

Local economies, retail diversity, and community health:

• Ports and rail yards impact local economies and result in reduced diversity in the retail establishments available to local residents.\textsuperscript{8}

• Diverse communities, that maintain retail establishments, commercial businesses, recreational areas and residential areas, promote greater activity among residents and are less impacted by obesity, hypertension and other activity-related diseases. People are more likely to be active, live healthier lifestyles, and walk around their neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Food & Water Watch. (2013) \textit{The Social Costs of Fracking: A Pennsylvania Case Study}.

Studies from other communities:

A number of health impact assessments conducted for neighborhoods located next to port facilities have found increased health risks for nearby residents. Trucks transporting goods to and from the port and traveling through communities are shown to be a significant contributor to air pollution. The co-locations near existing highway infrastructure mean that the communities are already burdened by mobile air pollution emission sources. These case studies described demonstrate the significant environmental, human health and economic costs ports that do not operate as good neighbors.

California:

\footnote{Map of San Antonio Quintana Road neighborhood and its schools bordering Port San Antonio. (2013). Texas Air Quality Monitor viewer (GeoATM). \url{http://www.tceq.texas.gov/gis/geotam-viewer}.}
• Moving goods in and out of ports is responsible for drastic health and economic problems in California because of the PM and Ozone generated.
• In 2005, port activities in California were responsible for an estimate of 2,400 premature deaths, over 60,000 hospital admissions for respiratory and/or cardiovascular problems, 5,100 cases of acute bronchitis, 3.9 million minor restricted activity days, and thousands of missed work and school days.\(^\text{16}\)

**West Oakland, CA:**

• West Oakland is a community neighboring the Maritime Port of Oakland, the Union Pacific Rail Yard and multiple freeways.
• A 2008 California Air Resources Board (CARB) health risk assessment conducted for West Oakland, CA found excess health risks because residents were being exposed to diesel exhaust from trucks, trains and machines.\(^\text{17}\) The study found elevated cancer and non-cancer health risks for the neighboring community and the region at large.
• The study found that residents were at risk to 1,200 excess cancers per million people at 2005 diesel exposure levels.
• Additionally, the region of over 3 million people is expected to suffer from significant non-cancer health effects, including 18 premature deaths per year, respiratory and cardiovascular problems that will result in eight hospital admissions, 290 cases of asthma-related and other lower respiratory symptoms.
  o As a result of this study, CARB issued regulations requiring reduction in diesel emissions from the industrial hub.
• Residents of West Oakland are more likely to be involved in fatal and non-fatal pedestrian-truck collisions than residents in other parts of Oakland.

**Roseville, CA:**

• Focused on health risks associated with locomotives at the Roseville Rail Yard in California.\(^\text{18}\)
• This risk assessment found significant health risks associated with exposure to diesel exhaust from the locomotives at the Roseville Rail Yard.
• Communities residing next to the rail yard had an excess cancer risk of 500 in one million as a result of the increase diesel emissions.

**City of Commerce, CA:**

• Commerce, CA has two major rail yards. Air monitors found elemental carbon, which indicates heavy diesel exhaust.
• This risk assessment determined that there was an excess risk of 2,000 cancers in one million people due to the rail yard.

_Baltimore, MD:_

• The city of Baltimore is currently deciding on several options to build a rail-truck intermodal facility, similar to Port San Antonio.\(^{19}\)
• The health impact assessment conducted on the proposals estimated that there would be 10 in 100,000 premature deaths if one of the proposals were approved.
• The study also found that the proposed facility would not create new jobs for people currently underemployed or unemployed, but would rather create jobs for already employed people that could take new jobs at the facility.
• The community, especially children, will be exposed to high levels of noise, for which no noise barriers exist. Community residents also expressed concerns about street safety and potential nuisance and health effects from the proposed facility.

**Southwest Workers Union and the Committee for Environmental Justice Action calls on the Port San Antonio and the City of San Antonio to:**

• Prohibit trucks from traveling along Quintana Road or other neighborhood roads.
• Improve pedestrian safety by increasing sidewalk coverage and cross walks in the Kelly community.
• Prohibit idling of trucks along the roads, in the East Kelly rail yard or in the Port of San Antonio.
• Place an air monitor for criteria air pollutants in the fenceline communities and make the data readily available to local residents.
• Designate the Quintana/Kelly community as a slow, quiet zone for all train travel.
• **Emergency Evacuation Plan & Emergency Notification System** for the communities and schools to be designed and implemented immediately to insure the health and safety of our families.
• Establish a fund to support community improvement projects and landscape areas adjacent to industrial sites.
• Construct a green soundproof buffer zone around the Port San Antonio and East Kelly Railyard.
• Enforce a quiet time (8pm – 8am) without noisy activities or flights.
• Soundproof all homes sitting in an area where noise levels exceed 60 decibels.
• Adopt the **Principles of Environmental Justice.**

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