

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS ON HEALTH OF AIR QUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

The following submission is made on behalf of the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group (MTAG). The submission focuses on the impacts on health of people in Melbourne's inner west due to poor air quality caused by diesel particulate emissions from trucks on residential streets.

MTAG is a resident-based community group campaigning to get trucks off residential streets in the inner western suburbs of Melbourne. We work closely with other community groups, including Less Trucks for Moore, an associated Footscray-based group that shares the same concerns.

There are obvious links between trucks, vehicle emissions, air quality and public health issues, including increased hospital admissions, respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses and mortality, and it is disappointing that the authorities that have the power to address this are doing so little.

The health issues we are facing will become a crisis without intervention. Trucks are making us sick.

PARTICULATE MATTER, ITS SOURCES AND EFFECTS

More than 21,000 trucks travel through Melbourne's inner West residential streets every single day. Francis Street, Yarraville alone has 7,000 trucks travel along it every single day, and has the dubious claim to fame of the highest levels of diesel pollution recorded in any residential street in this country. Many of these trucks are travelling to and from the Port of Melbourne and, with the expansion of Swanson Dock and development of Webb Dock, these numbers are projected to increase drastically over the coming decade.

Air testing by the Environment Protection Authority in Francis Street in 2001 and 2002 found airborne particle concentrations high enough to impact on the health of residents. The large numbers of trucks was cited as the likely source of the particles.

There is considerable existing scientific information on the negative impacts of diesel exhaust. As an example, the California Environmental Protection Agency describes diesel as follows:

"Diesel engines emit a complex mixture of air pollutants, composed of gaseous and solid material. The visible emissions in diesel exhaust are known as particulate matter or PM, which includes carbon particles or 'soot'. Diesel exhaust also contains a variety of harmful gases and over 40 other known cancer-causing substances... Those most vulnerable are children whose lungs are still developing and the elderly who may have other serious health problems."

More recently, the World Health Organisation declared that diesel fumes cause lung cancer. In June 2012, the International Agency for Research on Cancer - which had previously classified diesel fumes as "probably carcinogenic" - reclassified diesel exhaust as "carcinogenic". This puts diesel exhaust into

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the same category as other known hazards, such as cigarettes, asbestos and ultraviolet radiation. This is a significant concern for the local community.

THOSE POPULATIONS MOST AT RISK AND THE CAUSES THAT PUT THOSE POPULATIONS AT RISK

In 2007, MTAG commissioned a study into the impact of truck traffic on residents of the inner west.

The key findings were:

- 36% of respondents reported that they, or a member of their family, suffered from asthma. This is triple the Australian average according to the Asthma Foundation Victoria (2007). Eye, nose and throat irritations were also an area of concern for residents.
- 55% of respondents reported ongoing sleep disturbance from truck noise at night and in the early hours of the morning.
- 76% of respondents felt a consistent level of concern/fear having to use local roads because of the number of freight vehicles.
- 62% of respondents felt the effects of truck traffic (fumes and noise) prevented them from spending time in their house (i.e. their own backyard).
- 90% of respondents felt that the state government was not effective in controlling the levels of truck traffic on their local streets.

Children and people with existing respiratory or cardio vascular conditions are most vulnerable when air quality is poor. An article in The Age, *Diesel and cancer link sparks call* on June 14 2012 stated, "Maribyrnong, in Melbourne's inner west, has the state's highest rate of child hospital admissions for respiratory illnesses, according to VicHealth."

A recent May 2012 EPA community bulletin (Publication 1460) states,

"Everyone can potentially be affected by air pollution when concentrations of pollutants are very high. Research shows that different groups of people are sensitive to different types of air pollution. The prevalent air pollutant previously measured in Francis Street was small particles (PM10 and PM2.5). These particles are most likely to affect people with asthma, lung disease and cardiovascular (heart) disease.

"Older adults, children and those with heart and lung disease can be sensitive to particles. Particle pollution can irritate the eyes, nose, and throat. Particle pollution can also cause chronic bronchitis, coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and painful or difficult breathing. It can aggravate asthma, and even result in premature death in people with heart or lung disease. Even healthy adults may find they suffer temporary symptoms, such as sore eyes, throat or irritated nose, a dry or productive cough, tightness in the chest and shortness of breath.

"Common symptoms of dust exposure are irritated eyes and upper airways. Exposure to elevated PM10 levels (small particles) can increase the symptoms of existing heart and lung conditions, such as asthma. For people who are vulnerable, elevated PM10 may: cause allergic reactions and asthma attacks; worsen breathing-related problems in people with respiratory conditions; aggravate the symptoms of existing heart problems."

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Air pollution and poor air quality caused by those trucks is a real environmental issue in Maribyrnong, and the communities in these areas are at a much greater health risk due to diesel pollution exposure. This is demonstrated in health statistics as well as community experience.

THE STANDARDS, MONITORING AND REGULATION OF AIR QUALITY AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has been conducting an air quality and noise monitoring program along Francis Street. The intention of this 12-month monitoring program was to provide valuable information that will enable the comparison of monitoring levels against national and state air and noise quality objectives and standards.

However, MTAG considers that the findings are dubious given that it does not use world's best practice standards for analysing air pollution data and the EPA standards for reporting are ridiculously out of date.

For PM2.5 the EPA has a standard of 25 mg/m³. In the United States the law has recently been tightened to 12 mg/m³. For PM10 the EPA has a standard of 50 mg/m³. In the US it's been 30 mg/m³ for quite some time. MTAG queries why the EPA is not using these standards. If the EPA were using the higher standards, the levels reported for Francis Street would have been in breach on many days.

MTAG is also concerned that the measuring station has been installed in a location that does not represent the worst exposures that residents face.

MTAG does note that the Australian Design Rules have tightened national vehicle emission and noise standards for new vehicles, and that over time this will reduce emissions from trucks, but we are concerned at the time lag before any real benefits from more stringent vehicle emission and noise standards are achieved. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the local trucks that impact on residential areas in Maribyrnong are more likely to be older, poorly maintained trucks that are no longer suitable for long haul work.

Conclusion

MTAG recognises the significant contribution that the trucking industry makes to Victoria's economy and to jobs in the west. We have no desire to stop trucks going about their legitimate business, but they need appropriate infrastructure to do their job efficiently and without causing problems for diesel emissions into residential areas.

MTAG has a plan for getting trucks off residential streets in Maribyrnong. This includes: new and extended truck curfews that are effectively policed; a network of designated trucks routes that avoid residential areas; road links directly from industrial areas to freeways; freight efficiencies; freight onto rail; relocation of container yards; and increased use of public transport to free up space on existing roads.

Rod Eddington in his landmark 2007 East West Needs Assessment said that the Truck Bypass (that is, freight bypass ramps to take trucks directly from the Westgate freeway to the Port of Melbourne) was the number one priority for the west, and that doing nothing was not an option. He also said that the Truck Bypass was crucial, and that an East West Link alone would not solve the truck issue.

Governments have a responsibility to protect the health of citizens against known and preventable health impacts, such as excessive diesel exhaust. To protect the health of residents in Melbourne's inner west, the Government needs to get port trucks off residential roads.

People who live in the western suburbs should not have to give up the right to expect what other Melbournians take for granted: clean air and a healthy environment.

MTAG welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry.

Samantha McArthur
President
Maribyrnong Truck Action Group (MTAG)