



Colleen Hartland MP

Greens Member of State Parliament
for Western Metropolitan

www.colleenhartland.org

www.facebook.com/colleenhartland

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Committee Secretary
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PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

INTRODUCTION

More than 21,000 trucks travel through the residential streets of Melbourne's inner West every single day. Francis Street, Yarraville alone has 7,000 trucks travel along it every single day.

Each of these 21,000 trucks produces a constant stream of diesel exhaust, which is then inhaled by families who are in their homes, walking the streets or at the local park. Schools, kindergartens, and child-care centres are in a cloud of diesel pollution as a result of being located within metres of truck routes.

The problem is set to get a lot worse with the number of trucks on inner West streets projected to double by 2025 due to the expansion of Swanson Dock. Statewide, truck numbers are increasing at a rate double that of other traffic.

In addition, inner West neighbourhoods are also exposed to diesel pollution from both freight and regional passenger trains. Residents live within metres of train lines. The problem is set to get worse when the Regional Rail Link begins operation in 2016. The below photo is an example of the severity of pollution residents are exposed to every single day.

With pollutions standards, monitoring and enforcement being inadequate, communities in these areas are at a much greater health risk due to this diesel pollution exposure. This is demonstrated in health statistics as well as community experience.



MARIBYRNONG HAS THE HIGHEST RATE OF HOSPITALISATIONS FOR RESPIRATORY ILL-HEALTH

Vic Health data shows that the inner West – the Maribyrnong Local Government area – has the highest rate of hospitalization for respiratory ill-health in Victoria.

HEALTH STUDY BY THE MARIBYRNONG TRUCK ACTION GROUP (MTAG)

In April 2007, MTAG commissioned an independent survey to provide insights into the perceived impacts of truck traffic on residents living in Yarraville and Footscray. One thousand surveys were distributed throughout the suburbs of Yarraville, Kingsville, Seddon and Footscray, and more were completed online.

36% of respondents reported that they, or a member of their family living at their address, 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.

Nearly 50% of survey respondents experienced some form of physical symptom associated with exposure to diesel fumes.

Nearly 70% of respondents believed that where they live, their proximity to freight routes, has had a negative impact on their health.

46% of respondents are concerned that the close location of their homes to major freight routes did not provide a safe environment for their children.

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).

HEALTH IMPACTS OF TRUCK AND RAIL FREIGHT DIESEL

One truck can emit as much pollution as 100 cars, and diesel pollution is more damaging to health than that of a standard car, in particular due to the additional health impacts from diesel particulate matter.

Scientific information outlining the negative impacts of diesel exhaust is extensive and easily accessed. The California Environmental Protection Agency, for example, describes diesel in the following way:

"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."

DIESEL POLLUTION IS CARCINOGENIC

In 2012 the World Health Organisation declared diesel exhaust to be carcinogenic putting it in the same category as passive cigarette smoke.

Yarraville West Primary School and Yarraville Special Development School are within 150 metres of Williamstown Road and its traffic of 1,500 trucks per day, and they are within 200 metres of Francis Street, which at this point has traffic of more than 5,500 trucks every day. The kids at those two schools are exposed to the exhaust of a total of 7,000 trucks per day within 200 metres of their school.

Kingsville Primary School on Somerville Road has at least 1,000 trucks per day driving past its school fence.

Norfolk Street Child Care Centre is within 100 metres of the exhaust of the 5,600 trucks that travel Francis Street every day.

Merriwa Kindergarten has traffic of around 1,000 trucks per day that are 100 metres from its playground on Somerville Road. Clare Court Children's Service has more than 2,500 trucks driving past it every day, 150 metres from its play rooms.

Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School on Geelong Road has 4,000 trucks driving past its front door every day, filling the air with diesel exhaust.

Students at St Augustine's Primary School are exposed to the exhaust of 2000 trucks that pass their school's fence every day.

Would we sit back and let 4,000 cigarette smokers stand on the fence-line of the Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School? That is the number of trucks blowing diesel exhaust outside the school.

Now we know that diesel exhaust is in the same category as passive cigarette smoke, we must put a stop to it filling our air and our lungs in the inner West.

DIESEL POLLUTION AFFECTS RESPIRATORY HEALTH IN CHILDREN

In 2012, COAG published a study- Australian Child Health and Air Pollution Study (ACHAPS).

This COAG report linked truck exhaust with poor respiratory health in children.

It confirmed that vehicle exhaust affects children's respiratory health, and the higher the levels of exposure the worse the illness.

As outlined above, children in child care centres, kindergartens and primary schools are exposed to diesel exhaust from thousands of trucks every single day.

HIGHEST LEVELS OF DIESEL POLLUTION EVER RECORDED BY THE EPA ON MELBOURNE'S STREETS

Victorian EPA officers have informed the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group that the inner West is home to the highest levels of diesel pollution ever recorded on Melbourne's streets.

VICTORIAN AIR QUALITY STANDARDS INADEQUATE

Australian Air Quality standards and Victorian EPA standards for reporting are now lagging well behind world's best practice and should be adjusted. For example, air quality was recently recorded near Francis Street in Yarraville. In measuring fine particulate matter, PM 2.5, the EPA used a standard of 25 mg/m³. In the US, conversely, the law has just been tightened to 12 mg/m³ – less than half of that in Australia. For PM10 the Victorian EPA had a limit of 50 mg/m³. In the US it's been 30 mg/m³ for quite some time now. In this air quality measuring exercise near Francis Street, Yarraville, if the EPA was using world's best practice, the levels reported would be in breach on many days.

It is also worth noting that the measuring station was located away from the worst pollution hotspots and also up-wind of the pollution source (the trucks) according to the prevailing wind direction. This measuring station is therefore not based on world's best practice (in fact far from it) and its location will not deliver recordings representing the poor air quality that residents are exposed to.

INDIVIDUAL VEHICLE ENFORCEMENT INADEQUATE

While the public can report a truck as a smokey vehicle, there is no avenue for action on smokey trains. Attempts have been made by local residents to report smokey train engines to the EPA, but the EPA has advised that it is not their responsibility and there's nothing they can do.

To report a truck as a smokey vehicle is very difficult. For starters you have to be in front of the truck (I don't know of any situations when a person may be in front of a traveling truck and have the opportunity to take down the number plates & other basic details). The rear number plates on a truck are different to the body, and are trailer plates.

ACTION NEEDED NOW

"Given the additional health impacts from diesel particulates, exposure to this mixture of chemicals should be reduced worldwide." - Christopher Portier, chairman of the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) working group commenting on the June 2013 report declaring diesel exhaust to be a carcinogen.

"The evidence supporting the significant health impacts of particulate pollution is consistent and very strong, and what is needed urgently now, particularly with PM2.5, is appropriate action to minimise further morbidity and mortality." David Shearman, Doctors for the Environment Australia, 2010.

Governments have a responsibility to protect the health of citizens against known and preventable health impacts, such as excessive diesel exhaust.

The inner West community has been calling to action on the truck problem for more than a decade. Resident groups have been formed, including 'Maribyrnong Truck Action Group' and 'Less Trucks for Moore'.

More than a thousand people have participated in my 'Truck Solutions' campaign (see vicmps.greens.org.au/trucks), a fortnight ago I delivered close to 400 personally signed campaign postcards to the Premier, hundreds have written to the government and participated in community events and protests. The community is acutely aware of the problem and has been calling for the implementation of solutions. Many families have been forced out of the area for the sake of theirs and their children's health.

Successive Victorian governments have failed to protect the health of inner West residents. As The Age newspaper said "Over two decades of rising congestion, noise and pollution, the Kennett, Bracks, Brumby and now Baillieu governments have all offered plans but never taken effective steps to stop trucks using residential roads as short cuts."

In 2012, in response to both the WHO and the COAG reports, I called on the Victorian Minister for Health to either initiate a public inquiry or to undertake a health impact assessment under Part 5 of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, for which the minister is responsible. The Minister said the report would be assessed, further information would be sought, and a decision would be made in due course. More than 8 months later and not a word.

In 2013, I moved a motion in the Victorian Parliament for a Committee Inquiry to investigate the impacts of the growing freight truck problem, including health impacts. This was voted against by the Coalition MPs and therefore the motion was defeated and the extent of truck impacts remains hidden.

As is evident, despite the looming truck problem, we have seen no action from the Victorian government in two-and-a-quarter years. It has failed to come up with a freight strategy or rail freight target, despite the fact that one freight train takes 110 trucks off our streets. The shovel-ready West Gate ramps truck bypass project remains under review 27 months into the Baillieu government's term. Meanwhile truck numbers increase every day and the community's health suffers.

SOLUTIONS

Infrastructure solutions

1. The Westgate Ramps truck bypass is designed, costed and shovel ready. It will take 10,000 trucks off our streets every day. It should be built immediately.
2. Move freight onto rail. One freight train takes 110 trucks off the road. It is safer, healthier, reduces traffic congestion, improves road longevity, and reduces air pollution. Simultaneously, rail freight locomotives needed to be cleaned up.

Pollution standards, monitoring and enforcement

Rail freight locomotive and freight truck pollution standards, monitoring and enforcement needs significant improvement. See above: VICTORIAN AIR QUALITY STANDARDS INADEQUATE.

Smokey vehicle reporting is non-existent for rail freight locomotives and almost impossible for members of the public to report trucks, for reasons outlined above. In the absence of enforcement by the EPA, as is the case in Victoria, members of the public cannot assist.

A rail freight locomotive is not a 'vehicle' and therefore exhaust standards are not the responsibility of the EPA and no standards are enforced in Victoria - all efforts to get the EPA to pursue particularly bad locomotives have failed.

More solutions

There will no doubt be many options for improving this air quality situation, and all need to be investigated. I have outlined some of the infrastructure solutions and enforcement options. I look forward to hearing the committee's recommendations, because I certainly know this problem well.

IN CONCLUSION

I have lived in the inner West for more than 25 years. I have been a Member of the Legislative Council for 7 years, and a Councilor with the Maribyrnong Council prior to this. In my experience, more often than not, locomotives and trucks have filthy black, brown or grey exhaust streaming out of their engines. Truck and rail diesel emission standards, monitoring and enforcement appears to be inadequate to protect public health, and successive governments have failed to act. The way this issue is handled needs to change. The community's health needs to shift from the back ground to be front and centre and solutions need to be implemented now.

Yours sincerely,

Colleen Hartland MP
Member for Western Metropolitan Region