

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee investigating the impacts on health of air quality in Australia.

8/03/2013

Dr Kylie Goldthorpe

My home is 1.5kms from the train line in Toowoomba and also about 1.5 kms from the Warrego highway as it passes across east Creek as James Street.

We have lived here for 22 years.

In the last ten years the amount of black dust particulate pollution on my home has steadily increased. When we first lived here the only dust we saw on our home was red: a reflection of the deep red soils in this area.

Since the start of massive coal mining activity to the west of Toowoomba about ten years ago we now have constant coal train traffic along the rail corridor. These train wagons carry the loads uncovered so the dust they expel is significant. As production ramps up the train line has been inadequate to handle the volume of coal and now large numbers of trucks are also used to transport it to the port of Brisbane. The extreme weather events of the last few years have also damaged the rail line and these force more trucks onto our already damaged and congested roads.

The noise pollution and loss of amenity for residents close to the transport corridors is rising and yet there is no action from local council to control and ameliorate these problems. The excessive truck traffic is also causing extra diesel fumes and it is also well documented in the medical literature that the particulate matter from diesel exhaust is a serious health risk.

The Toowoomba Regional Council and the State government have failed our community in its responsibility to protect us from these serious air quality problems. They fail to do scientifically meaningful measuring and data collection and they fail to notify the public of the results, the risks and in turn, warn of any possible future protective measures we may be able to implement.

The extremely black dust that collects on my home and washing lines is clearly not soil. It has the blackness of charcoal. I do not think it should be up to an individual house holder to test the dust on their homes to find its origin and its possible health impacts. On some days the dust was so bad it left dense black stripes on my clothes. My only regret is that I did not take photos at the time. I know from bitter experience one's complaints fall on deaf ears.

The medical literature describes the health problems of coal dust, especially small particulate matter PM 2.5 and smaller, and this is not tested regularly in Toowoomba. Adding to our woes is the massive expansion of the coal seam gas mining industry and all its infrastructure is transported

through Toowoomba. These developments should never have been permitted to start until **AFTER** the transport infrastructure of the region had been expanded to be able to manage the volume of traffic. Such is the congestion and traffic density through Toowoomba that now our air quality is seriously affected. Many of my neighbours especially those with young children complain of the asthma levels here. Every level of government in this area, Federal (LNP), State (Labour and LNP) and local council has failed to take responsibility and due care of air quality in Toowoomba.

Today I have taken photos of a door frame of my house. The entire house was washed a few months ago and up to this point I had not thought there was any point in photographing the pollution on my home as I have so little confidence that government would bother to act.

I only heard of this senate committee investigation a few days ago so there has not been time to collect a meaningful range of samples. I will however start collecting in the hope that the committee visit our area.

I recommend the committee visit our town and region to see first hand the cumulative failures that have been perpetrated upon the Garden City.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kylie Goldthorpe BVSc