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Environmentalists, Community Leaders Deliver Scathing Criticism of Port of Seattle for Dragging Feet on Pollution Clean Up

Broad Coalition Accuses Officials of Appeasing Industry Lobbyists by Studying Problem “to Death” rather than Implementing Life-Saving Standards

SEATTLE -- A leading coalition of environmental, community, labor, and faith-based organizations today slammed the Port of Seattle for delaying action to slash deadly emissions from diesel rigs. The criticism came after elected port commissioners signaled their intention to rubber-stamp a recommendation to continue to study pollution reduction – rather than enacting life-saving environmental and operational requirements that port trucking companies must adhere to in order to upgrade fleets to current U.S. EPA standards.

A recent independent [investigation](#) by KCTS and Investigate West confirmed concerns that [diesel coming from port trucks](#) in South Seattle was leading to increased rates of cancer, asthma and a variety of other ailments and yet Port CEO Tay Yoshitani was [fighting efforts](#) to reduce truck pollution.

“People die every single day from diesel pollution, and the Port’s response is to study the problem to death? It is outrageous,” said Christina Gallegos of the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice, a partner in the Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports. “There is a proven path to put clean trucks in service right now without spending public money but clearly the Port is more interested in protecting the wealth of the industry, rather than the health of Seattle’s communities.”

Dirty trucks built before 1994 were banned from port terminals on January 1. The Port Commission set a goal of converting the majority of trucks to 2007 EPA

standards --- in 2016 but declined to set any enforcement mechanism. Actual compliance with 2007 standards would not be required until 2018.

Port commissioners John Creighton and Rob Holland have earned praise from the environmental and labor coalition for strongly objecting to their colleagues' support of such weak standards.

"While the Port drags its feet, more and more people get sick," said Brady Montz, Chair of the Seattle Group of the Sierra Club. "There are some 8,000 trucks registered with the Port and we know most are dirty diesel-burning trucks that spew poisons throughout South Park and Georgetown everyday. And they spread out around the region, traveling around Qwest field, through Mercer Island, into Kent. The Port's current truck program is deeply flawed and hardly clean."

Replacing the small number of pre-1994 trucks took the Port years of planning and millions of taxpayer dollars to subsidize individual drivers to replace their vehicles one-by-one, rather than requiring the powerful trucking and shipping industry that profits from the movement of goods in a \$56 billion annual industry at the Ports of Seattle and Tacoma to take responsibility for full fleet conversion.

An EPA compliant truck can cost upwards of \$100,000. Port truck drivers, who are treated as "independent contractors" by their employers as a means to avoid payroll taxes and push business costs onto the workers behind the wheel, earn \$28,700 a year. That figure is an average based on a dozen credible studies on the industry in the past five years.

"I can't afford to buy a new truck and I don't know a driver who can," said Benyam Keydna, a port truck driver at the Port of Seattle, "And really, how can they ask workers like me to? Most of the time I have to choose between food for my family and fuel for my truck."

Heather Weiner of Joint Council 28 of the Teamsters, the nation's largest union of transportation workers, noted that truck programs in Vancouver, B.C. and in Los Angeles, Seattle's biggest competitors, are cleaning up operations and were among the first ports to bounce back from the recession to attract more cargo volume. Those policies require port trucking companies to directly hire their workforce and be responsible for owning and operating fleets.

"There is a proven policy solution that can boost the green job sector, reduce pollution, improve public health, and help responsible businesses grow and compete in the new economy," said Weiner. "It's time for the Port of Seattle to follow the leadership of Commissioners Creighton and Holland and say 'no' to the status quo: Modernizing the port is a long-term investment that merits real capital and real commitment between port authorities and private businesses – not taxpayers and workers behind the wheel."