



## Get the Facts About...Coal Dust

**Fact: While coal dust from trains can be an issue close to the mines where it's loaded, it is not an issue when travelling through the Northwest.**

Drawing on decades of experience and extensive research, BNSF Railway has determined that coal dust can be a problem near mine-loading points but not as trains travel further from the mines. After extensive study, the company identified that coal dust near loading points caused costly accelerated track maintenance and since 2011 has required shippers to control dust. The method most commonly used is the application of a surfactant, or sealant, on the loaded cars. Train cars that have been loaded correctly and properly treated effectively address any issues presented by coal dust.

**Fact: There is no evidence that coal dust from shipment of coal affects health in local communities.**

Campbell County, Wyoming accounts for roughly a quarter of all Powder River Basin coal production. According to the American Lung Association, health problems such as bronchitis and asthma are either at or below the national average, and it received an A in air quality from the American Lung Association.<sup>1</sup> Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska, a major coal train thoroughfare, also received an A<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, the current air quality of the Columbia River Basin, where no coal is mined, received an F grade in air quality.<sup>3</sup>

**Fact: Coal trains have travelled through the Northwest for decades and have never been an issue.**

Millions of tons of coal has been shipped by train through the Northwest in the past few decades, mostly en route to port facilities in British Columbia. As of 2011, the Northwest Clean Air Agency, Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, and Spokane Clean Air Agency had no record of any complaints regarding coal dust from trains.<sup>4</sup>

*"I have worked in, on, and around trains and rail equipment for over 17 years all across Washington State. ... I can tell you for certain I have never experienced or heard complaints of coal dust from trains in Washington State. None of my members, who operate and work around coal trains 24/7, have reported health issues related to coal dust."*

– Mike Elliott, Chairman of the Washington State branch of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American Lung Association [State of the Air Report 2012 – Campbell County, Wyoming](#)

<sup>2</sup> American Lung Association. "[Report Card: Nebraska](#)," [State of the Air 2012](#)

<sup>3</sup> American Lung Association. [Report Card: Washington](#)

<sup>4</sup> Building Industry Association of Whatcom County "[Gateway Pacific Terminal Considerations](#)" October 27, 2011

<sup>5</sup> Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen "[No Health Issues Related to Coal Dust](#)," April 18, 2012.