

The Impacts on Health of Air Quality in Australia

Date: 8th March 2013

My Experience

I live in Tighes Hill a suburb of Newcastle that we all assumed would be a clean suburb after the closure of the BHP steelworks in 1999.

However the dust from the coal stockpiles situated in Port Waratah, just across nearby Industrial Drive, and from the uncovered coal trains which run frequently on the railway line (two streets away) to Port Waratah, is blown onto my house.

My house faces north and the north easterly wind/breeze which blows regularly in our area, and is a lovely cooling breeze on a hot day, unfortunately blows coal dust onto my house and through my front screen door and open windows (trying to catch the cooling breeze).

I lived in the tropics for 15 years and returned to my hometown of Newcastle in 2006. The dry season in Darwin and Dili becomes very dusty but I never experienced hay fever until I moved back to Newcastle when my son had his first child. I now have to take anti-histamine tablets frequently and use a prescription nasal spray to prevent debilitating hay fever.

After I moved to Tighes Hill in 2008 I experienced my first ever bout of bronchitis.

I like living in Tighes Hill for many reasons – it is close to the city and the beaches and easy access to Newcastle university where I am studying. Also there is a great community feeling in Tighes Hill. It is a small and friendly suburb. So I am not planning to move and anyway I couldn't afford to move even if I wanted to.

At one air quality meeting that I attended two or three months ago, an expert said it was very difficult to separate coal dust from ordinary dust in testing. I used to wash louvre windows in Darwin late in the dry season and the dust was grey. When I wash my front verandah in Tighes Hill the dust is black. Here is a picture of my front verandah after a heavy storm a few weeks ago. The black coal dust stands out. The picture was taken on 16 February 2013.



After the storm my front door was filthy as the coal dust that had attached itself to the mesh of the security door was driven onto the front door by the rain. I didn't think to take a photo before I washed it clean.

In the *Newcastle Herald* yesterday (7th March) are some results from a study commissioned by the Coal Terminal Action Group – a coalition of 18 Hunter community groups. I contributed \$25 towards this study because I wanted to see dust monitoring results from a study that wasn't conducted by the coal industry themselves.

The article 'Study shows dangerous levels of dust pollution' by Matthew Kelly, says that dust particles ranging from 1 micron in diameter (PM1) to 10 microns (PM10) were measured at Tighes Hill, among other suburbs between December 5 2012 and January 5 2013.

The study showed "Suburbs closest to the Port of Newcastle recorded significantly higher levels of particulate pollution compared with levels recorded at monitors in Cooks Hill. Higher levels of particulate pollution were also recorded when the wind came from nearby coal stockpiles and the coal train line."

The government must have studies of the effects of coal dust on health. I do not have copies of these studies and can only record my personal experiences.

My recommendations

All New South Wales coal trains should be covered.

I have attended a few meetings of the Port Waratah Coal Services and pointed out to them that Queensland coal trains were covered. They said that was because the Queensland coal hadn't been pre-washed. I think that pre-washing New South Wales coal is not sufficient in stopping coal dust being blown from coal trains.

Coal stockpiles near suburban areas should be covered.

Port Waratah Coal Services say that the stockpiles are watered when the wind reaches a certain temperature. My experience of living in Tighes Hill shows me that this method is not adequate in stopping coal dust being blown onto the surrounding areas. In my case particularly when a north-easterly wind blows.

A fourth coal loader should not be built in Newcastle.

This is vital for our health. Newcastle and Hunter Valley residents are suffering, and have suffered enough, respiratory health problems. Please give us a break.

Yours sincerely
Jude Conway