

Presbytery of Seattle Overture on Coal Exports to Asia

Presbytery of Seattle overtures the 221st General Assembly (2014) to affirm the decision of civil authorities to conduct a full, programmatic review and assessment of the impact of expanded coal export projects in Washington and Oregon on human health and the well-being of communities along the Northwest rail lines. Civil authorities are called upon to require full disclosure and consideration of the combined effect of all coal export projects taken together on the poorest and most vulnerable communities, locally and globally. The Presbytery of Seattle further affirms that the evaluation of coal export involves moral choices, in which key considerations are **caring for the creation which God has made** and with **careful stewardship and justice** for those who depend on a stable climate and water supply for survival.

Congregations throughout the Presbytery of Seattle share a deep commitment to values of justice and stewardship toward the most vulnerable including children, the unborn, the elderly and those suffering from poor health because of environmental hazards including air pollution, shrinking water supplies and climate disruption.

The burning of coal is harmful to public health and is the leading cause of emissions of mercury, which is a neurotoxin, and greenhouse gasses which disrupt climate, damage watersheds and cause ocean acidification.

The transport of over 105 million tons of coal a year from the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming through Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington to be burned in Asia would entail a significant number of trains on a 1,500-mile route and would affect many communities in the Synod of the Rocky Mountains and the Synod of Alaska-Northwest, including our own Presbytery of Seattle. Because these trains and barges must be uncovered, up to 500 pounds of coal dust per car, per trip, escape along the train track. Dramatically increased coal cars on these lines present health risks from additional coal dust and diesel exhaust, will clog traffic in local communities, stress the shipment of domestic products by rail, delay emergency vehicles, and require taxpayer support of all at-grade crossings and bridges.

Many communities along the proposed routes have opposed the significantly expanded shipment of coal, or asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to undertake a comprehensive review of the projects to include the impact on human health and on the global climate. Faith leaders have asked authorities to review the harmful effects on God's creation of the whole lifecycle of coal for export, from mining to transport to burning.

As people of faith, we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves. In the United States, coal-fired power has steadily declined in the last decade because of a shift to natural gas, increased conservation and renewable energy, as well as stronger anti-pollution rules. Local communities, including many faith voices, have prevented new coal-fired power plants from being built and set strict limits on air pollution from existing plants. Knowingly enabling pollution of the air that our global neighbors breathe is morally unacceptable. Additionally, air pollution in China contributes to pollution in our Presbytery and across our synod, including mercury in local waters, melting glaciers and disruptive weather patterns.

Further reliance on coal slows the transition to better stewardship of God's creation through clean and renewable energy, conservation and energy efficiency. Climate change is a serious threat to generational justice. Faith community leaders have the moral responsibility to ask civil authorities to consider all effect of the mining, transport and burning of coal on all of God's children.