

Phyllis J. Kardos

According to the BNSF, the amount of coal dust that escapes from PRB coal trains is surprisingly large. While the amount of coal dust that escapes from a particular coal car depends on a number of factors, including the weather, BNSF has done studies indicating that from 500 lbs to a ton of coal can escape from a single loaded coal car. Other reports have indicated that as much as 3% of the coal loaded into a coal car can be lost in transit. In many areas, a thick layer of black coal dust can be observed along the railroad right of way and in between the tracks. Given the high volume of loaded coal trains that move each day in the PRB, large amounts of coal dust accumulate rapidly along the PRB rail lines.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad admits that coal dust can "weaken railings, plus the coal dust can surrounding the rail track can cause fires." According to PacWest's own data of raw materials, there will be about 1,500 inbound coal train cars per year coming into the Newport area and to the PacWest facilities location.

What environmental damage will result from the coal dust over a period of 5 years, 10 years, 20 years and beyond? Who is responsible for the irreparable damage that will be caused by the coal dust? Who will be responsible for the financial obligations if a fire starts along the railroad track; Who is responsible for coal dust damage along the banks and the waters of the Pend Orielle River and Lake Pend Oreille and other bodies of water the coal trains will be passing by from source to destination.