



1600 South Second Street
Mount Vernon, WA 98273-5202
ph 360.428.1617
fax 360.428.1620
www.nwcleanair.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 21, 2015

National air toxics data suggests transportation, wood smoke pose highest health risk

Local counties' average risk lower than dense urban areas

When it comes to airborne toxics, transportation and woodstoves are the biggest contributors to the risk of getting cancer or respiratory illness in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties. In larger, densely populated urban areas, those risks tend to be higher.

That's the Northwest Clean Air Agency's takeaway after reviewing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's latest National Air Toxics Assessment – or NATA data – released Thursday. The data is in line with previous reports.

"The value of this data is that it shows patterns of health risk associated with air pollutants across broad geographic areas," said Northwest Clean Air Agency Executive Director Mark Asmundson. "It can help regulators, health officials, policymakers, scientists, businesses and the public focus on reducing people's exposure to air pollution."

As the local agency that regulates and permits businesses that release pollutants into the air, NWCAA was particularly interested in risks from those businesses.

The NATA data shows cancer risk associated with air toxics from industrial pollutant sources is considerably lower than transportation related toxics: air toxics from vehicles on our roads and "secondary" toxics. Secondary toxics form when hazardous air pollutants are transformed in the air into other chemicals. Transportation sources produce the biggest human caused share of those precursors to secondary toxics.

Transportation and wood smoke are the sources of airborne toxics most likely to lead to respiratory health problems in our jurisdiction. NWCAA doesn't have jurisdiction over transportation emissions, and although people don't need a permit to burn wood for heat, NWCAA does have enforcement authority over excessive chimney smoke.

"Even though toxics from the businesses within our range of authority appear to be less responsible for these health issues than transportation and residential burning, we will continue to be vigilant in enforcing air quality laws and regulations, and in looking for opportunities to further reduce air pollution from all sources in our jurisdiction." Asmundson said.

Emissions from the transportation sector have been declining and are expected to continue to decline. Toxic vehicle exhaust has decreased by about half, or 1.5 million tons, since 1990. As people upgrade to newer vehicles, EPA expects these reductions to grow to 80 percent by the year 2030. In addition, diesel particulate emissions decreased by about 27 percent from 1990 to 2005. EPA projects an additional 90 percent reduction from 2005 to 2030 as recent rules targeting diesel engines go into effect. Reducing particle emissions reduces the toxics that come with them.

The NATA data looks at statistical risk associated with toxics in the air. It doesn't take into account five of the six common air pollutants with established national standards, called

criteria pollutants: ozone, fine particles, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide. (Lead is a criteria pollutant, but it is also a toxic air pollutant, so it is considered in the NATA data.) NWCAA monitors for certain criteria pollutants in strategic locations throughout its jurisdiction.

While the assessment provides a high-level look at risks from air toxics, EPA cautions against looking at it for comparisons among neighborhoods, counties or states. NWCAA continues to be the best source of information about local air quality and the emissions from the businesses in its jurisdiction that emit air pollutants.

More information:

- U.S. EPA National Air Toxics Assessment: www.epa.gov/national-air-toxics-assessment
- NWCAA current air quality and monthly summaries of industry fence-line monitoring in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties: www.nwcleanairwa.gov/airQuality/current.asp
- NWCAA emissions inventory: www.nwcleanairwa.gov/airQuality/inventories.htm

CONTACT:

Mark Buford, Deputy Director, 360-428-1617 ext. 207

Katie Skipper, Communications Program Manager, office: 360-428-1617 ext. 235, mobile: 360-319-0739, kskipper@nwcleanair.org

The Northwest Clean Air Agency is responsible for enforcing federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources of air pollution, the agency provides services and information related to asbestos, indoor air quality, outdoor burning, woodstoves and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at www.nwcleanair.org.