

Local Health/Air Quality Effects of Coal Dust

- Coal dust is the cause of the infamous [black lung disease](#) in coal miners, as well as [a variety of other lung and breathing problems](#). The [highest exposures to coal dust](#), and thus the greatest risk of illness and death, are for workers, especially miners, but also those working in the transport and processing of coal. (Coal jobs aren't good jobs.)
- Coal dust contains [Particulate Matter 2.5](#), which can contribute to premature death, asthma, prenatal complications, respiratory illness, and cardiac disease.
- Exposure to PM 2.5 has [been linked to increased mortality from Covid 19](#).
- There is [no safe level of exposure to PM 2.5](#).
- PM 2.5 in coal dust may be especially toxic, with [concentrated amounts of heavy metals including lead and arsenic](#).
- Even short-term exposures of an hour or two to PM 2.5 are [associated with serious health impacts](#).
- Humboldt County is [out of compliance](#) with state PM 10 ambient air quality standards. PM 10 is considered slightly less toxic than PM 2.5, but still has [similar and severe health impacts](#). Coal dust contains both [PM 10 and PM 2.5](#) and would put us even further out of compliance with state standards and increase negative health impacts.

Bottom Line

Coal dust is notoriously toxic, causing a wide range of lung and heart problems for those exposed – both workers and residents of nearby communities. Coal transportation and processing would release large amounts of coal dust and exacerbate existing air quality problems caused by vehicle emissions and road dust in Humboldt County.