

# Oregon Updater



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## Clean Air for All

### The Campaign to Ban Field Burning



Last winter, OTA committed to organize the grassroots effort in support of Representative Holvey's bill to ban field burning in Oregon. We knew there was overwhelming support for the bill in Lane County, but we recognized to win in Salem we would have to convince legislators from around the state that field burning smoke harms those of us exposed to it and that viable alternatives exist.

OTA started by contacting the hundreds of folks who called to complain last summer and those who wrote letters to the editors of Willamette Valley papers. We

held town hall meetings, placed newspaper ads and helped generate a great deal of positive media reinvigorating the demand for an end to field burning.

OTA helped assemble an impressive coalition of Valley-wide residents, medical professionals, business owners, elected officials, and the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency opposed to the practice of open field burning. HB 3000 was endorsed by the Eugene City Council, Lane County Commissioners, Lane County Medical Society, Oregon Medical Association, Oregon Lung Specialists, and the American Lung Association of Oregon.

The House Health Care Committee heard compelling evidence linking life-long lung dysfunction and exposure to fine particulate. Individual Oregonians and their attending physicians provided the Committee with specific information on health problems associated with exposure to field burning smoke. The Committee approved the bill with a "do-pass" recommendation.

Unfortunately, the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee did not and thus the bill failed to reach the floor for a vote.

OTA was successful at reinvigorating the issue of field burning by rallying a dynamic grassroots response. We all knew a win in the Legislature wouldn't be easy given the influence of the grass seed industry and their allies. Before the legislative session began, OTA analyzed our options for bringing an end to field burning. We're now gearing up to pursue our next action. Stayed tuned for further details!

Our thanks go out to everyone who wrote their legislators, who sent personal testimonials to us, and who came to Salem to bear witness to the legislative process. With the strong coalition we have around this issue, it's only a matter of time before we put an end to field burning.



## Pesticide Buffer Zone Campaign

### Our Schools Should be Drug Free, Violence Free, and Pesticide Free!



In a landmark move, OTA and our community partner, Forestland Dwellers, secured the support of Senator Vicki Walker to introduce Senate Bill 20. This legislation establishes protective buffer zones around Oregon schools and school bus routes to safeguard children from harmful exposures to pesticide drift. Why is this issue so important to us?

OTA gathered support for pesticide buffer zones from throughout the state. Over 20 Oregon education, health and environmental groups want laws that provide pesticide drift protections for children, including the Oregon Education Association.

SB 20 received a hearing before the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee on April 10. That is an important first step. Committee Chair Brad Avakian said that the testimony by OTA, rural residents, educators, chemists and the advocates of children's health was excellent and convincing. Unfortunately, due to the intense opposition from the agricultural and timber lobbies, the bill itself never received a vote. As an alternative, Senators Walker, Bates, and Prozanski suggested that the Senate set up a legislative task force on pesticide practices and children's health. State Superintendent Susan Castillo also voiced support for the task force. In response, OTA has drafted a Senate proposal to do just that, and we will continue to work with our legislators, educators, and other health and environmental organizations to protect our children from pesticides.



#### Did you know?

- Numerous cases of pesticide drift have been documented at Oregon schools.
- Aerial herbicide spray operations are taking place within one mile of rural school grounds on a regular basis.
- New research from OHSU found that levels of pesticides in the bodies of children correlates with impaired cognitive skills.
- 2, 4-D, a frequently used herbicide, has been linked to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma — a type of cancer of the immune system.

# Getting Benzene Out of Oregon's Air

## A Victory for Health!

OTA is celebrating our successful partnership with Multnomah County Commissioners who voted unanimously to adopt our recommendation for a resolution that reduces emissions of benzene, a known carcinogen. The resolution, voted on at the Commission's April 26 meeting, was introduced by Northeast Portland Commissioner Jeff Cogan. He championed the issue as a way to clean up Multnomah County's air and do something to reduce health impacts from harmful toxics. The other Commissioners agreed.

The resolution limits unnecessary idling of county fleet vehicles to one minute or less whenever practical, and changes county vehicle fueling procedures. County vehicles will no longer "top off" their tanks, which will save significant amounts of fuel from evaporation and leakage.

In a surprising show of support various businesses also agreed to sign-on to the resolution. They include Legacy Health Systems, Hoffman Construction, Inc., Neil Kelly, New Seasons Markets, Providence Health System and Temp-

Control Mechanical Corporation.

OTA felt Portland was a critical area to focus on this issue, because benzene in that area presents a cancer risk at levels 20 times higher than the safety standard set by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ). But benzene pollution is an issue throughout the state. Levels in the Eugene-Springfield area are estimated to be 10 times higher than ODEQ's safety standard. OTA will soon promote a benzene reduction resolution in Eugene and Corvallis, and is already working with school districts to educate parents and students about the importance of eliminating idling.

OTA is leading the state's benzene reduction project because benzene is major contributor to poor air quality and emerging as a major public health problem.

We urge citizens and businesses to follow Multnomah County's lead and take a few, easy steps to reduce benzene emissions:

- Avoid "topping off" at the gas

### Facts At the Pump

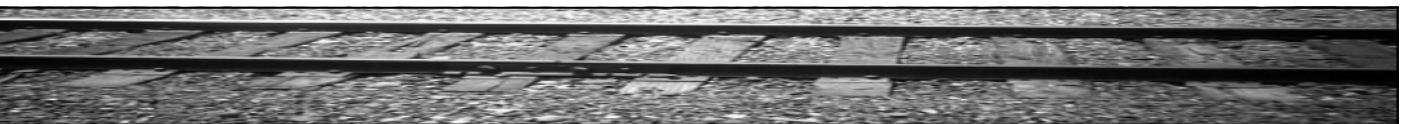
- Spilling an ounce of gasoline from topping off the gas tank produces the same volatile organic compound emissions as a car driving 56 miles.
- Once the nozzle clicks off the first time, the gas you're paying for is NOT going into your tank. You're paying for something you're not getting!
- A single vehicle dropping off and picking up kids at one school puts three pounds of pollution into the neighborhood air per month.

pump. Ask the attendant not to top off the tank, or request a specific dollar amount of fuel.

- Avoid vehicle idling to "warm up" a vehicle and while stopped at schools, businesses, drive-up windows and other places where waiting is common. Vehicle idling over fifteen seconds is considered excessive.

Contact OTA to find out more. ♦♦

## Railyard Contamination Campaign Protecting Eugene's Neighborhoods



Due to the vigilance and determination of OTA staff and our neighborhood association partners, residents living adjacent to the industrial area of Eugene's railyards are finally being provided some protection from the toxic legacy of railyard operations. For years, residents of these neighborhoods have voiced concerns about cancer, miscarriages, rashes and a number of illnesses, plus the safety of the water and the air.

Union Pacific(UP) hired a number of consultants to investigate the extent of groundwater contamination coming from the railyard. At first they told everyone that their pollution created no risk to area residents. Unsatisfied with these platitudes, OTA and concerned citizens continued to pressure UP and state agencies to conduct a more thorough assessment of the health risk. At our insistence, a second assessment was completed in 2006. This time the as-

essment showed that groundwater contaminated with diesel fuel, industrial lubricants, solvents and heavy metals poses an elevated cancer risk to some area neighbors, and may already be causing health problems.

The 2006 study confirmed our suspicion that some River Road residents should not use their irrigation wells for gardens, car washing, filling pools, pets, etc. The study also showed that the solvents contaminating the groundwater are volatilizing up through the soil and entering the homes of some Trainsong neighbors. The chemicals are odorless and invisible, so residents have no idea that they are breathing contaminated indoor air. Trainsong residents closest to the yard and Union Pacific's own employees have the greatest exposure to these chemicals, some of which can damage a person's liver, lungs and brain and even cause cancer.

In response to the neighborhood's concerns about the long-term effects of exposure to these chemicals, OTA demanded that the State evaluate to what extent nearby residents are being harmed by the contamination. The Oregon Superfund Health Investigations and Education Program, a state agency, will report their findings about the nature of this cancer risk at a public meeting on May 31. Preliminary information indicates that, just as OTA suspected, a higher than normal cancer risk exists for residents exposed to these pollutants.

OTA urges neighbors of the railyard and other interested residents to attend the meeting and learn more about what the health implications are from exposure to railyard pollution. For more information about the May 31 meeting, please call our office. ♦♦

Oregon Toxics Alliance  
P.O. Box 1106  
Eugene, OR 97440  
Phone: 541-465-8860

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