

Tell the Office of Surface Mining to Prevent Toxic Orange Clouds

Dear Friends,

As the coal strip mines of the Powder River Basin have expanded, so have the blasting operations at the mines. Each week, millions of pounds of explosives are detonated to remove the ground covering the coal seam. Blasting results in a large cloud of fumes, and more than occasionally, results in an orange cloud of toxic air pollution.



Toxic orange clouds like the one seen above regularly result from blasting operations.

The orange color means the cloud contains a high concentration of nitrogen oxides, including nitrogen dioxide. When inhaled, nitrogen dioxide becomes nitric acid as it encounters moisture in the lungs. Exposure at high levels can cause respiratory problems, lung damage and even result in death. Exposure at even low levels can result in headaches, nausea, and nose bleeds. Exposure can also cause health related problems in livestock and wildlife near the mines.

Blasting at coal mines can produce nitrogen oxide levels as high as 30,000 parts per billion, or 300 times the level of nitrogen oxides deemed safe by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Our members who live near the mines tell stories of having to run home from fieldwork if an orange cloud approached. Kids sometimes have to run home from the bus stop to avoid exposure, and schools have to shutter the windows if an orange cloud comes close.

But, it doesn't have to be this way. It's possible to blast without creating such dangerous nitrogen oxide concentrations. Coal mine regulators point out that these orange clouds are tied to incomplete explosive combustion or bad blasting practices. By implementing best practices—blasting under the right conditions with the right fuel mix and size—mines can take significant steps to protect the health of their workers and surrounding communities.

Our organization has worked for years to improve blasting operations to protect public health. We now have a great opportunity because the federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM), which oversees coal mining in the U.S., is considering creating new standards to prevent nitrogen

oxide emissions from reaching visible levels. This would prevent toxic orange clouds from circling over homes, ranches, and communities near the mines.

Please help protect the health and safety of our members and other citizens living near the coal mines by submitting a comment to tell the Office of Surface Mining that they should improve their regulations to prevent toxic orange clouds. The message is that simple—orange clouds are preventable and the federal standards governing coal mines should do everything they can to protect public health and safety.

You can comment by visiting <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OSM-2014-0003-0029> Alternatively, you can email your comments to sanderson@powderriverbasin.org and we will forward them to the agency on your behalf.

Please submit your comments by the **September 25th** deadline. If you have questions, or need more information, contact Shannon at our office at (307) 672-5809 or sanderson@powderriverbasin.org Thanks for your interest and action!



Signs in the Powder River Basin warn citizens to avoid the area because of blasting emissions. Unfortunately, for people that live and work near the mines, the area is unavoidable. A better solution is to prevent these toxic emissions from occurring in the first place.