

Study looks at air quality of West LB rail yard

By Kristopher Hanson, Staff Writer

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Researchers are wrapping up work on a detailed two-year study of health impacts from pollutants emitted by trains, trucks and cranes at a massive rail yard bordering West Long Beach.

The Intermodal Container Transfer Facility, or ICTF, moves about 750,000 containers annually through a roughly 150-acre facility on Willow Street just west of the city's border.

Air quality around the site is among the region's poorest, though much of the danger is blamed on overall activities from the twin port complex just four miles south of the rail yard.

Still, the California Air Resources Board found in 2008 that trucks, trains and other equipment at the yard spew about 24 tons of diesel soot into the air annually, listing the rail yard as one of the state's four most polluting.

Air quality in neighborhoods around the site have a cancer rate of about 1,200 in a million, some 4,500 times higher than federally "acceptable" rate of 25 in a million.

The rail yard is one of four being studied by UCLA and Loma Linda University. The others

are in Commerce and San Bernardino.

The UCLA study may affect the outcome of a proposal by Union Pacific, which operates the yard, to modernize the site and allow for a potential doubling in cargo movement in coming years.

Under the \$400 million proposal, UP says it will replace on-site diesel-powered cranes with electric equipment, improve truck traffic flow with new entry and exit gates and move

yard-bound traffic off the Terminal Island (103) Freeway and onto Alameda Street.

Estimates are that the moves would cut total emissions 75 percent while reducing noise and light complaints.

The modernization plan has languished for more than two years, however, amid protests by neighborhood groups. The yard falls under the jurisdiction of the Port of Los Angeles.

The UCLA study is being directed by the university's Center for Occupational and



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Environmental Health, which is working off grants from the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

Neighborhoods adjacent to the rail yard and several miles away in East Long Beach are targeted in the report, which researchers hope will bring greater understanding about the risk diesel soot brings to residents living near such facilities.

Diesel soot has been linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as cancer and asthma.

Scientists are monitoring what pollutants, vapors and other toxic emissions are most prevalent around the site, and their impact on human cells.

Current estimates are that locomotives at the yard emit 42 percent of diesel particulates, trucks 32 percent, cargo-handling equipment and cranes about 18percent and yard tractors roughly 7 percent.

By introducing cleaner fuels, newer trucks and locomotives, electric cranes and smoother traffic flow, air-quality regulators believe the site could be markedly cleaner.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, which is advocating for new rules protecting residents from ship, truck and train pollution, notes that beside particulate matter, chemicals emitted from port commerce include benzene, arsenic and formaldehyde.

The UCLA study, due some time later this year, should pinpoint what's floating around

Long Beach neighborhoods, and how these chemicals are toxifying local residents.

To view updates, visit www.coeh.ucla.edu or visit the South Coast Air Quality District's air monitoring site, which tracks air quality in your ZIP code by the hour.

The site is www2.aqmd.gov/webappl/gisaqi2/VEMap3D.aspx.

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