

ABOUT US

Green Lents is a non-profit that began as a community group in 2009 and is dedicated to providing leadership, educational and volunteer opportunities in and around the Lents neighborhood to support vibrant and sustainable communities.

We are working towards building a Clean Air Action Team in East Portland to address air toxins in our communities. Get involved!

Email: getinvolved@greenlents.org



AIR TOXINS IN PORTLAND AN INVISIBLE THREAT





THE OREGON GREEN NEW DEAL

1. PHASE OUT FOSSIL FUEL INFRASTRUCTURE

Place a moratorium on all new fossil fuel permits and projects.

2. STRONG REGULATION FOR HEALTHY, BREATHABLE AIR

Enact strong regulation of diesel and other pollution from industry, transportation, and energy sectors.

3. CLEAN, COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED, 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY

In order to limit global warming to 1.5 C we must reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

4. REGENERATIVE, SUSTAINABLE FARMS AND FORESTS

Care for Oregon's natural and agricultural resources, people and communities who experience them.

5. TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE

Address transportation, one of the largest carbon polluters in our state and a major source of air toxics and greenhouse gases.

6. PROTECT COMMUNITIES ALREADY EXPERIENCING A CHANGING CLIMATE

Ensure communities are prepared for and made whole following more extreme weather events including heat waves, poor air quality, forest fires, erosion, and floods. Directly engage Tribal, rural, and low-income communities and communities of color in this process.

7. FUND THE JUST TRANSITION. FUND REAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS.

REIMAGINE A GREEN CITY

What would a non-toxic green city look like? How would our city be built in a different way. How would our communities interact differently and what would like look like? Moving beyond a fossil fuel economy and society will require massive changes for how our cities are constructed and how our communities fit in them. We can start having conversations about how this future city and world would look and begin as a community making it so. What is important is that we all have a say and power in the the shaping the ongoing process, not just those with wealth and influence. The Oregon Green New deal offers one vision on how we could begin to get there!



INTRODUCTION

Despite Portland's green reputation, everyday people across the metro area breathe some of the country's most polluted air, and it's a silent killer. The culprit is extremely high levels of air toxins. Unlike smog, which is highly regulated by the federal government as one of only six "criteria pollutants", air toxins are fine invisible particles of heavy metals that build up in the body causing a wide variety of health issues from asthma, heart disease to cancer.

In Portland, diesel pollution alone is estimated to cause as many as 460 premature deaths each year with a loss of productivity and health costs up to \$3.5 billion a year. Industrial polluters, and a growing prevalence of unfiltered diesel engines from trucks and construction equipment are the primary causes of this unsafe air. While the economic interests of pollution profiteers and a lack of political will by elected officials continue to produce extreme health risks for our communities, "with our powers combined" we can take measures to ensure our safety through people power. But first we must understand the extent of the issue we face.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

UNFILTERED TRUCKS

Pollution caused by diesel results in more fatalities than car crashes in the state of Oregon. Between 40,000 and 60,000 diesel trucks travel Portland's roads each day and studies have shown that people of color and low income neighborhoods are disproportionately affected by their emissions. Yet even with the extraordinary health impacts of diesel inhalation it continues to be a unregulated toxin by the Federal Government, with the State of Oregon only regulating a small fraction of the worst polluters.

California has implemented strong regulations of diesel trucks that require high quality filtration systems. As a result of this Oregon has become a dumping ground for old trucks with high polluting engines. This has caused residents in Multnomah County to breathe the dirtiest air in the state with the highest level of diesel pollution in the country and face the largest risk of pollution related cancer. While the recent Oregon house bill 2007 attempts to stave off some of these impacts it doesn't go far enough.

TAKE DIRECT ACTION

We can take action against air toxics by making the changes we want to see in the world and our communities ourselves. To improve the air outside we can plant trees to help filter the air. We can purchase masks that filter out fine particulate to our neighbors and family when there are air quality alerts are on. We can also build safe rooms in our homes to be used in emergency situations using air filters and indoor plants.

ADVOCATE FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

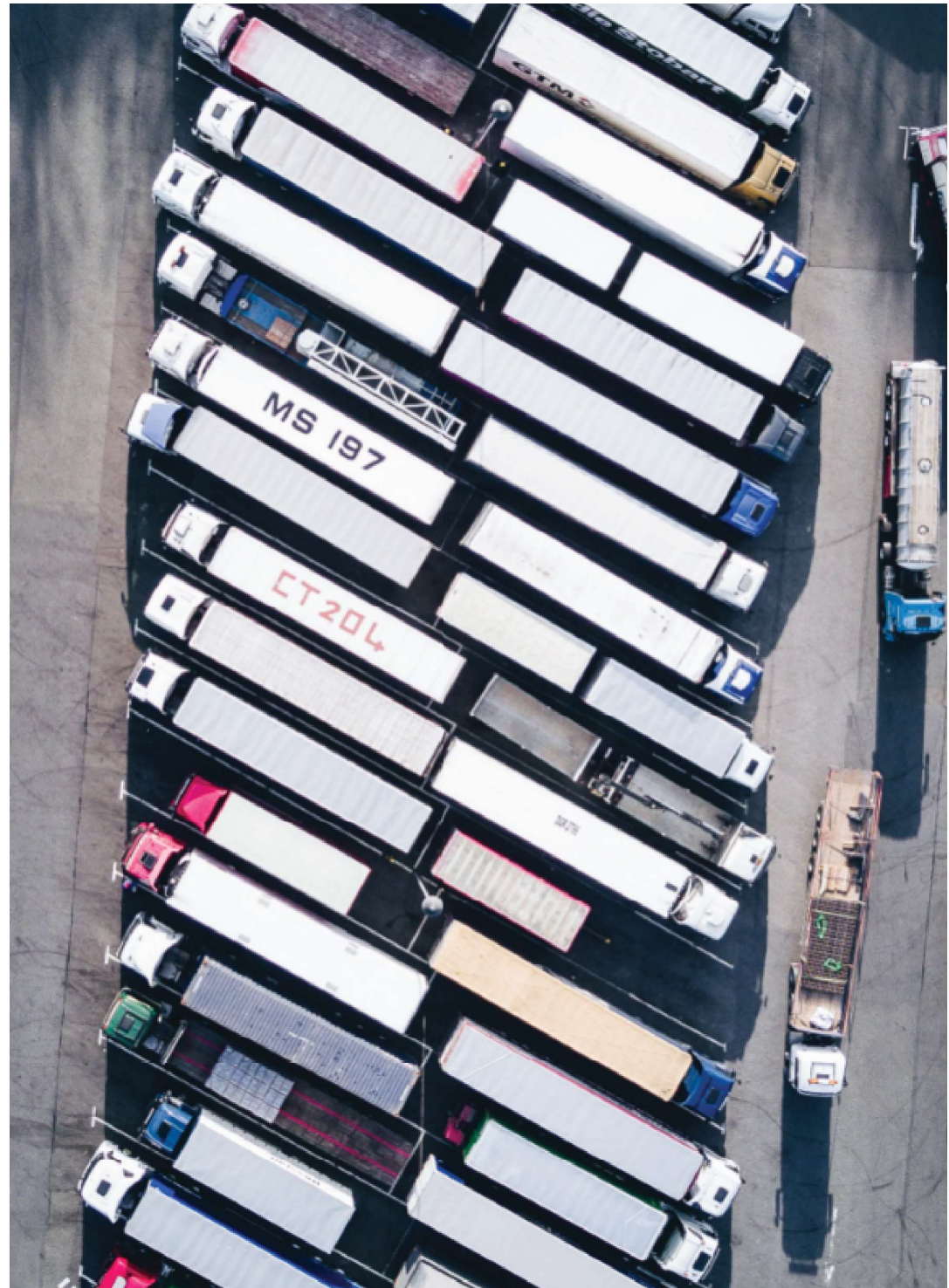
We can advocate for an economy based on the Just Transition. We can imagine many ways to get to an ecological society. One way might be the creation of an independent air quality regulatory agency specific to Multnomah County and the City of Portland that centers community controlled process and Just Transition principles. In the summer of 2018 Multnomah County conducted a feasibility study around the creation of such a regulatory agency. It found that the creation of such an agency could surpass many of DEQ's weak standards and address many of the cities air quality issues.

WHAT WE CAN DO

To create the systemic change we need to end deadly air pollution, there are many steps we can take. From DIY methods of reducing your personal exposure to community wide solutions, we have options.

RAISE AWARENESS

Many are unaware of Portland's bad air quality. Educating our community members, sharing articles and starting up conversations about air quality are all starts to building momentum for change.

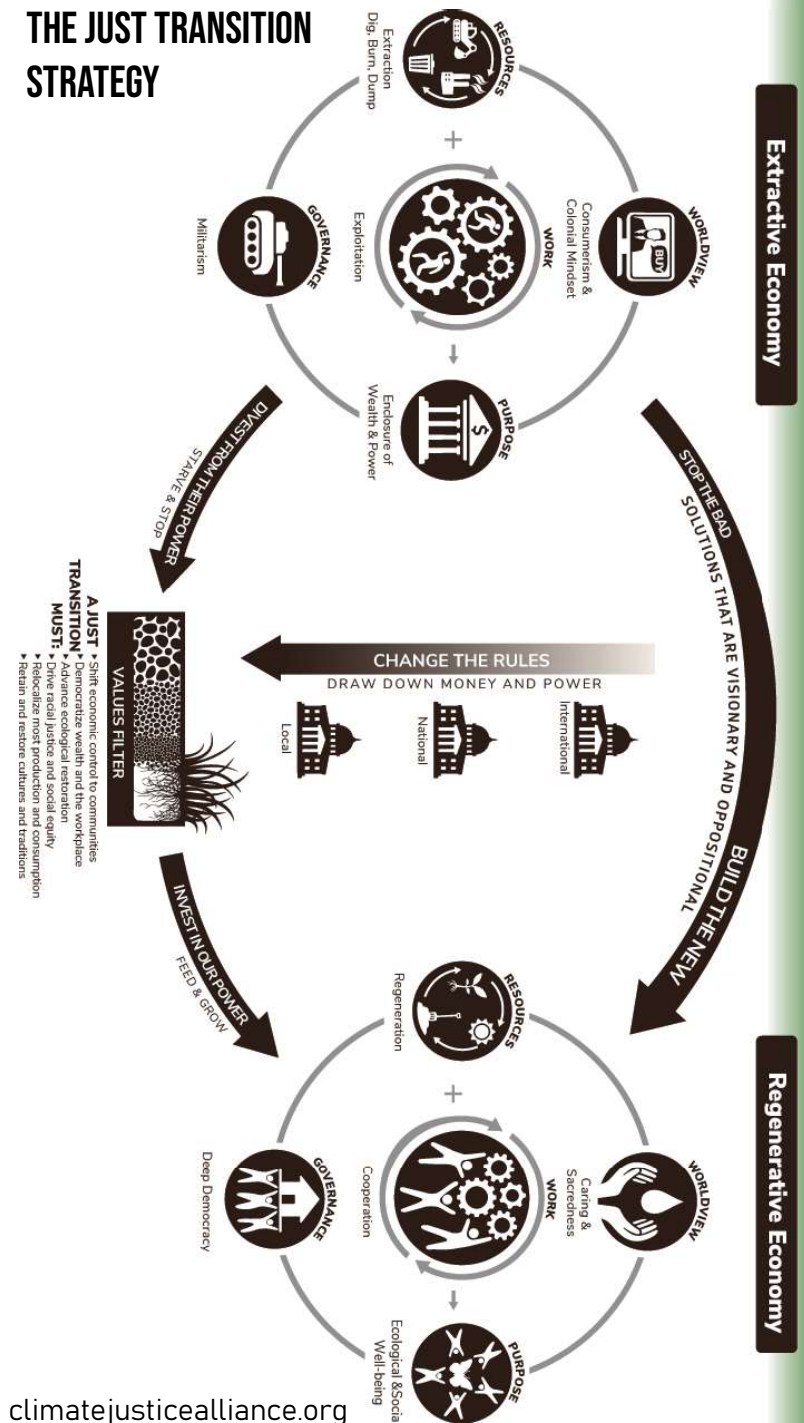


CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT



Even with the extreme levels of pollution from unfiltered trucks the largest diesel polluter in the Portland area is hands down the construction industry. Over 65 percent of diesel emissions in the Portland area come from these unfiltered “non-road” vehicles. This has resulted in serious health impacts for both construction workers and neighbors who live around these stationary polluters. In a city with rising rents, and a problem with displacing working class and communities of color with condos, construction related pollution presents serious equity and quality of life issues for marginalized people’s.

THE JUST TRANSITION STRATEGY



THE BIG PICTURE

Air toxics are the product of economic activity, from commercial trucks moving goods across the country, manufacturing industries producing the finished products we use everyday to construction outfits building the homes we live in. Of course all of these jobs are occupied by workers who depend on them for their livelihood and are also the most likely to suffer the consequence of their employing companies pollution practices. This is why we need a just transition that ensures working people everywhere have a future in the new economy.

We believe the creation of an ecologically sustainable democratic economy is possible. A for-profit economy drives companies to always strive to minimize the bottomline while maximizing profits, at the end of the day it is the quality of our environment and our personal health that suffers as investment in new environmentally sound equipment and infrastructure is always sidelined. In a democratic and ecological economy, all of the communities needs are taken into consideration, and it is the communities themselves who make the decisions, not just the business owners. We call this new economy and our strategy on how to get there the Just Transition.

INDUSTRIAL POLLUTERS

In addition to the grave dangers associated with diesel pollution, heavy metals emissions from industrial facilities in the Portland area compound the risks. In 2016 it was discovered that thousands of Portland residents had been exposed to highly toxic arsenic air pollutants from the Bullseye Glass Company's facility in SE Portland. For decades, families in the area had inhaled up to 300 times the acceptable daily levels of cadmium and other cancer causing heavy metals. The incident at Bullseye has received much publicity; unfortunately, it is far away from the only source of dangerous industrial pollution in Portland.



Precision Castparts is listed as one of the country's largest industrial polluters. They operate half a dozen industrial facilities in the Portland area. With several major industrial accidents in the past decade they have put thousands of tons of heavy metals into the air. One incident of note was when in 2011 a massive toxic orange cloud of nitrogen dioxide ruptured from their facility exposing thousands of residents.

This all sounds pretty bad and we haven't even started looking into how health risks are compounded by the almost annual arrival of smoke clouds over the city from forest fires. Despite activist organizations fighting for legislation to regulate diesel pollution for years the Oregon State legislature has failed to take action. As such, it is up to us to make the changes we need on a local level. To truly end the use of air toxics we need systemic change.



David Cliff / NurPhoto via Getty Images