

The Problem: Freeway Air Toxins

The City of Pasadena Is Worsening Exposure to High Levels of Freeway Pollutants

In the last 13 years, the city of Pasadena has approved the construction of 5 different near-freeway housing projects. These include roughly 1230 mostly apartment residences, to include hundreds of children, all located within the pollution “hotspot” between interstate 210 and Foothill Boulevard. All of this housing is either right next to the 10-lane I-210 freeway or within 700 feet of it.¹ All of this housing exposes residents to very high doses of carcinogenic freeway air toxins, mainly from diesel particles emitted by more than 17,000 trucks/day that pass this stretch of the I-210 in East Pasadena.²

However, the latest of these developments (at 3202 East Foothill Boulevard) is the most problematic, as in 2018 the city approved building it immediately beside the freeway on a US Navy toxic-waste site that will not be fully cleaned up before residents live on it.³ It will be home to **hundreds of children** and families.⁴

On 1-24-19, the city of Pasadena planned to worsen residential exposure to high levels of carcinogenic freeway air toxins when it released its East Pasadena Draft Vision. This document called for **rezoning many near-freeway areas to allow residential use** and to allow denser, greater-height commercial buildings that would **make East Pasadena a “commercial destination center** in the city.”⁵

However, this proposed East Pasadena development will massively increase East Pasadena air pollution. The 22,000 residents who live in this area already face diesel-particle levels that make their air **dirtier than what 70 percent of other Californians breathe**.⁶ The city’s “vision” statement thus proposes to increase pollution harm to 22,000 people who are already disproportionately polluted and disproportionately victimized residents of Pasadena and California.

Similar Increases in Freeway-Air-Toxin Exposures throughout Southern California

For at least 15 years, California air-quality officials have warned against freeway-pollution threats to health and against building homes and schools near freeways. Yet many Southern California political officials---like those in Pasadena---are ignoring these warnings from California health officials. Repeated scientific findings show that living within 1000 feet of freeways increases rates of **Alzheimer’s, asthma, autism, dementia, heart attacks, lung cancer, childhood obesity, strokes, lung cancer, and pre-term births**.⁷

The California Air Board **recommends against** putting either housing or schools within 500 feet of freeways, because of severe freeway health threats. “Sensitive populations [like children, older adults, pregnant women, sick people, asthmatics, and so on are adversely affected by freeway pollution] at a distance of 1,000 feet from freeways.” For this reason, Los Angeles uses “the 1,000 feet [near-freeway-development] boundary, as the distancing threshold, for conservative consideration of risk from the negative effects of air pollution caused by freeway proximity.”⁸

Stop Development Near Freeways and in Already-High-Pollution Residential Areas

Even beyond 1000 feet from freeways, East Pasadena wind patterns mean that freeway-related toxins also expose tens of thousands of innocent residents to massive diesel pollution. (See note 6.) This excess pollution requires that no more development at all should occur within these high-pollution zones. Why not? Any additional development

would only worsen the health of existing residents. The 2019 East Pasadena Draft Vision, proposed by Pasadena city planners, worsens the already severe air pollution in East Pasadena because it calls for this area---more diesel polluted than 70% of California communities--- to become a “commercial destination center in the city,” as already noted.

Current US Census data and California Enviroscreen data show that virtually everyone who lives in East Pasadena---that is, East of Hill Avenue and North of Colorado Boulevard is already living in a disproportionately-diesel-polluted area. These East Pasadena residents live in the 30-percent-dirtiest and most health-dangerous of all California communities. This area of Pasadena already has **worse diesel-particle pollution than what 70 percent of all Californians bear.**⁹

Although more than 22,000 East Pasadena residents, 15% of the city’s population, already live in some of the worst diesel pollution in the city, city of Pasadena planners have targeted them to receive even more diesel pollution and resulting health threats. This targeting is apparent in the city’s “vision” to have East Pasadena become a “commercial destination” for the city.¹⁰

Even more important, the city has put at risk an especially sensitive and vulnerable group, the roughly **5,000 children, under age 18, who live in** this East-of-Hill, North-of-Colorado area known as **East Pasadena**. These children are especially at risk because when children and adults bear the same levels of pollution exposures, children are hurt 10 times more than adults.¹¹

As later answers to the FAQ show, why should the 22,000 East Pasadena residents, including 5,000 children under age 18, bear even worse health risks? Why should the city decide to deliberately worsen their air pollution, when already East Pasadenans are living in air pollution that is worse than what 70% of Californians bear--and worse than what most Pasadenans bear?

Notes

1. These 5 city-approved housing developments are at 3202 E. Foothill (550 units), 3330 E. Foothill (212 units), 3360 E. Foothill (188 units), 3488-3452 E. Foothill (258 units), and 178 N. Halstead (19 units). Together they amount to 1227 units, for 3000-4000 people, all within one-third mile.

2. Truck Traffic: Average Annual Truck Traffic, California Department of Transportation. 2016. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/trafficops/census/>.

3. See the scientific and legal documentation on this website, under the “US Navy Toxic Waste Site,” <https://stoptoxichousing.org/site/>

4. <https://ww5.cityofpasadena.net/planning/wp-sites/56/2018/01/3200-E-Foothill-SCEA.pdf>;

5. <https://stoptoxichousing.org/east-pasadena-draft-vision.pdf>

6. Pollution Burdens, Los Angeles Times, <http://graphics.latimes.com/responsivemap-pollution-burdens/>

7. See FAQ, Frequently Asked Questions, also in this “Freeway Air Toxins” section. See, for example, Melissa Healy, The surprising link between air pollution and Alzheimer’s disease, 3/31-19, <https://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-air-pollution-alzheimers-20170131-story.html> and Tony Barboza, Freeway pollution travels farther than we thought. Here's how to protect yourself, 12-30-17, <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-freeway-pollution-what-you-can-do-20171230-htlstory.html> and California Air Resources Board, Health Effects Associated with Traffic, <https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/research/health/healthup/march07>

8. City of Los Angeles, FREEWAY ADJACENT ADVISORY NOTICE, , ZI NO. 2427, 2018,
<http://zimas.lacity.org/documents/zoneinfo/zi2427.p>

9. https://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/dc10map/tract/st06_ca/c06037_los_angeles/DC10CT_C06037_014.pdf and Pollution Burdens, Los Angeles Times,
<http://graphics.latimes.com/responsivemap-pollution-burdens/>.

10. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

11. See FAQs, Frequently Asked Question 5, IS IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE NEAR FREEWAYS also in this “Freeway Air Toxins” section.