

SOS (Save our Soils) LIVERPOOL PLAINS
Caroona NSW

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MEDIA RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL POLLUTION EXPERT VISITS LIVERPOOL PLAINS TO WARN OF SERIOUS HEALTH IMPACTS FROM COAL

One of the world's leading experts in the health impacts of industrial pollution, Dr Dick van Steenis, is visiting Caroona on the Liverpool Plains to highlight the harmful impacts that coal-related industries have been shown to have on human and animal health.

Dr van Steenis, who studied pollution science at Harvard and authored the UK Coal Health Study ⁽¹⁾, has been researching the causes of death and chronic disease from dusts generated by coal mines, power stations and incinerators for over 15 years ⁽²⁾.

His ground-breaking research on coal mining in Wales in the early 1990s found that the rate of asthma puffer use in children was directly proportional to how close they lived to a coal mine.

On his Australian tour, he will address communities across NSW's coal-mining heartland to discuss the disturbing implications for lung and immune-system health of those living downwind of coal mines and power stations, as well as the impact coal dusts have on clean food production and water supplies.

His visit to Caroona on Monday 7 December comes as the local community wages an ongoing battle with BHP Billiton and China's giant miner Shenhua which are both seeking to establish large-scale coal mines on the Liverpool Plains.

SOS spokesman, Dr Pauline Roberts, said the community was delighted that Dr van Steenis had made time to visit Caroona and highlight the serious health risks linked to coal that are rarely spoken about in Australia.

"The evidence which has begun to emerge internationally over the last couple of decades is very disturbing indeed but for some reason governments the world over have been very slow to react," said Dr Roberts.

"Clearly there's enormous revenue flowing to mining companies and governments from coal but at what cost?"

"It is essential that the work of experts like Dr van Steenis is highlighted and understood so that no other community is exposed to the pollution generated by a major new coal mine without the proper research having been done to show the potential risks it may pose," she said.

International research shows that babies, children and the elderly are particularly susceptible to the fine particles generated by mining processes and increased mortality rates are associated with coal-communities.

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The latest report by the US physicians for Social Responsibility ⁽³⁾ "*Coal's Assault on Human Health*" confirms the UK study findings stating: "*Coal pollutants affect all major body organ systems and contribute to four of the five leading causes of mortality in the US: heart disease, cancer, stroke and chronic lower respiratory diseases....each step of the coal lifecycle impacts human health.*"

Used as an expert witness in successful pollution cases in the US, the former GP will be meeting concerned members of the medical community during his two-week speaking tour. His visit will take in other coal-affected regions of NSW including Gloucester, Singleton, Muswellbrook and Newcastle with a final talk in Sydney⁽⁴⁾ on 11th December.

SOS Liverpool Plains supports Singleton Shire Healthy Environment Group's call for an independent, scientific study into air quality in the Singleton region to determine whether coal mining and coal-fired power transmission is adversely affecting the health of their community.

References:

- (1) http://coalhealthstudy.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/douglasdale_v42.pdf
- (2) <http://www.countrydoctor.co.uk/education/Education%20-%20Industrial%20air%20pollution.htm>
- (3) <http://www.psr.org/resources/coins-assault-on-human-health.html>
- (4) <http://coalhealthstudy.org/2009/11/> "Coal Health Speaking Tour"

Contact: SOS Liverpool Plains:
Dr Pauline Roberts 0407 011 733
pjr@divstrat.com.au