

R. A. Stegemann

Hong Kong, Tuesday, June 4, 2002

Environmental Protection Department
http://www.info.gov.hk/epd/english/how_help/reportpollution_2.html

10/F, Sha Tin Government Offices
No.1 Sheung Wo Che Road
Sha Tin, New Territories

Facsimile: 852 2158 5757
Telephone: 852 2685 1133

Re: Traffic Noise, Construction Noise and Nonroad Vehicle Air Pollution

Dear Sir/Madam,

Attached you will find a copy of a news article recently downloaded from the New York Times about the prevention of construction pollution at Ground Zero in New York and the Big Dig in Boston.

As a resident of Ma On Shan's Sunshine City and one of many residents exposed to the chronic noise from road traffic and rail construction between ours and the Bay Shore Towers estate, this article is of particular interest. It represents just one more source of environmental pollution that has made living in Ma On Shan most unpleasant. A few brief visits to any of the real estate offices that handle ours and the adjacent estate will tell you that I share my anxiety with many others.

Already before the construction of the rail station began I was disturbed by the chronic traffic noise emanating from the street below. No trees, no plastic shields, absolutely no environmental protection of any kind between the bus and "siuba" traffic, the towering concrete walls that serve as echo boards, and my 30th floor apartment. With the introduction of the new rail project the level of sound disturbance has magnified three to four-fold during the daylight hours.

Although there is likely little one can do to shield us from the construction noise, there is much one can do to shield us from the chronic traffic noise and, more recently, air pollution emanating from the idling and non-idling

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diesel engines of nonroad construction vehicles.

Please read the attached article carefully and make a visit to Sunshine City to observe, breathe, listen, and experience for yourself the living hell to which many of us are subject on a daily basis. If you are still not convinced, then rent an apartment here, and experience the situation for several weeks.

As a professional economist I am one of the last people that would stand in the way of economic development. Nevertheless, since the new construction began, screaming children have become commonplace and wandering elderly in search of tranquility have become a common sight.

My own energy bill has nearly doubled as I have found it necessary to close my apartment windows and run my air conditioner to hide from the noise and air pollution. Even this is a only a partial remedy, as the windows of Sunshine City are not soundproof.

A two-year veteran of Ma On Shan, and
a concerned Hong Kong resident

Sincerely,

R. A. Stegemann

Attachment: Ground Zero Diagnosis by Bob Herbert, New York Times

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June 3, 2002

Ground Zero Diagnosis

By BOB HERBERT

In an emotional and dignified ceremony last Thursday, the city brought an end, at least symbolically, to the recovery effort at the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan.

It won't be long before rebuilding begins, and that area of Manhattan will become one of the largest construction sites in the nation. As plans for the reconstruction go forward, city and state officials will have an opportunity to ensure that the risk of cancer and other health problems associated with the pollution that comes from heavy construction vehicles is kept to a minimum.

It's an opportunity they should seize.

Diesel particles from bulldozers, dump trucks, cranes and other construction vehicles would pose a significant threat to the long-term health of workers, residents, schoolchildren, shoppers, tourists and others in a highly congested neighborhood like Lower Manhattan.

Construction vehicles are not subject to the same air pollution standards as ordinary cars and trucks. So they pollute more, which means they are a greater threat to the public's health.

Andrew Darrell, the New York regional director of Environmental Defense, said: "Diesel particles pose the single greatest source of cancer risk from mobile sources of air pollution. Nonroad engines, like construction equipment and marine vessels [barges, tugboats, ferries, etc.], emit more fine particles than the nation's passenger cars, trucks and power plants combined."

The good news is that the Lower Manhattan reconstruction effort can be made much more environmentally sound — and thus safer — if a series of simple steps to reduce the pollution are taken. Those steps include the use of low-sulfur fuel; the installation of special filters or oxidation catalysts on trucks, construction vehicles, marine vessels and other heavy equipment; and — perhaps simplest of all — a reduction in the idling of vehicles.

In a report released last January, Environmental Defense noted that in addition to the increased risk of cancer, "the fine particles from diesel that are breathed deep into the lungs are responsible for thousands of premature deaths from other causes every

year."

Among those most sensitive to fine particle pollution are infants and children, the elderly and individuals with pre-existing heart and lung conditions.

For children with asthma, the fine particles emitted by diesel engines can be devastating. The report said: "Children experience declines in lung flow and increased symptoms such as cough, phlegm production, and sore throat after particle exposure, but children with asthma are more susceptible to these effects than other children. Children's emergency room visits for asthma increase on high particle pollution days."

Construction vehicles, which are likely to be concentrated in Lower Manhattan for years, also contribute a disproportionate share of other air pollutants, including carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides. When you think nitrogen oxides, think smog and haze. Nonroad engines give us five million tons of nitrogen oxides annually, which amounts to a fifth of total annual emissions in the United States from all sources.

The most recent evidence that a concentrated effort to reduce fine particle emissions can work comes from Boston's Central Artery Tunnel project, known as the Big Dig. The Massachusetts Highway Department installed state-of-the-art emission control equipment on 100 construction vehicles, which has sharply reduced pollution already and is expected, over five years, to produce a reduction in emissions equivalent to reducing large truck traffic by 96 million miles, or taking 1,300 diesel buses off the road for a year.

By focusing on this matter now, public officials and others involved in the plans for Lower Manhattan would be able to require from the very beginning that the construction equipment and vehicles used in this huge project are as environmentally safe as is reasonably possible.

The Trade Center tragedy has been an environmental nightmare. The cleanup effort, conducted under dreadful conditions, has been remarkable. Now it is time to think about averting as much of the health danger of the rebuilding process as possible. And an important component of that process is avoiding the introduction of unnecessary new concentrations of contaminants, and especially the fine particles contained in diesel exhausts.