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For Immediate Release

Air Quality and Road Dust

In this past month we have seen several days of special air quality statements for Golden due to dust advisories. So what is road dust, where does it come from, and why is it bad?

Golden has two major highways going right through the town. In the winter the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure lays down traction material such as sand so cars can grip the road better in icy or snowy conditions. In the Spring when the snow melts the roads are brushed in order to clean them which often results in a lot of road dust. This year however we have seen multiple snow melts throughout this abnormally warm winter. Cars driving on the road can kick up road dust too, which is likely why we have been getting dust advisories lately.

Road dust can be annoying as it can make windows and cars dirty (and make it harder to breathe), but it is also a serious health concern. Road dust produces PM10, which are particles less than 10 micrograms in diameter that are small enough to pass through the nose and mouth and enter the lungs. PM10 is of particular concern to people with chronic respiratory illnesses such as asthma, and for children and seniors. Every year Golden consistently has among the highest PM10 levels in the province.

The Ministry of Environment issues air quality advisories for the Town of Golden when PM10 levels rise above the provincial objective of 50 micrograms per cubic metre for 24 hours. During these advisories it is recommended that people with underlying respiratory health issues limit outdoor activity and stay inside if possible.

Road dust is a major contributor to PM10, but PM10 can also come from industrial operations. In Golden companies like CP can produce a lot of dust from their operations; this needs to be controlled and managed. Dust pollution is also compounded with other air quality issues in Golden such as excessive smoke from wood stoves and slash burning, idling from trucks and trains and emissions from the mill and other industry.

One solution to excessive road dust is to use traction materials that contain less fine silt and are harder to break down. The Town of Golden has significantly reduced their dust pollution by changing the traction material they use. The cost of using traction materials that are less prone to producing road dust is higher, but this can be offset by having to use less traction materials since they are more effective, and streets need to be sprayed and cleaned less often. Costs aside, it has the benefit of

producing less road dust pollution during the snow melt, which benefits everyone in the community. Lowering the speed limit on residential streets would also result in less road dust as well.

Considering Golden has some of the highest PM10 levels in the province, these would be wise things for the province to review and help bring our air quality to their own standards.

Submitted by the Air Quality Committee Wildsight Golden