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Coal dust concerns mount after Baltimore bridge collapse

By JC Whittington 05/16/2024 10:35 AM EDT Link Copied

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When a massive cargo ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge in late March, it blocked one of the country's critical shipping lanes responsible for the transport of goods like sugar and cars.

The collapse is causing a monthslong slow down in coal exports, leaving the industry scrambling to figure out how to move the fossil fuel as stockpiles grow.

In the small industrial town of Baltimore's Curtis Bay the slowdown exacerbates an existing air quality issue: Inhaling coal dust from an open-air coal pile that freight rail giant CSX has maintained there for over 140 years.

David Jones, a resident of Curtis Bay, alleges that CSX's coal pile has polluted the air and made it hard to breathe.

"I try to take a deep breath. I don't get fresh air. I get nothing but coal dust and all the other particulate matters from the industries, and I start choking and coughing," said Jones.

CSX said they are committed to working with the community on [improving dust control](#) but [denies that they are responsible](#) for air pollution.

Federal officials want the Port of Baltimore back to business as usual. The rebuild of the bridge could take up to four years and cost up to \$1.9 billion, all of which President Joe Biden promised the federal government would pay for.

As they marshal enormous resources to Maryland, Curtis Bay residents hope their concerns about air pollution are heard.

[Watch here](#) for more on the struggle between a community advocating for clean air and a freight rail company trying to conduct business.