EPA Takes First Stab at Curbing Big-Ship Pollution

Local News

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SEATTLE - Cleaner air for the Washington coast is a little closer to reality. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The high-sulfur, bunker fuel generally used in large cargo and cruise ships emits the same types of pollution as coal-fir

Sarah Burt is an attorney for *Earthjustice*, the law firm representing groups that have been trying to get the EPA to make these rules since the mid-1990s. She says the agency could be much tougher.

"The EPA has authority to regulate all ships that come into U.S. ports and waters. And so, EPA could have applied these standards to all ships that emit pollutants, in the United States. And that's what we have been encouraging EPA to do."

Burt says the new rules aren't more stringent because the agency doesn't want to put American shipping companies at a disadvantage, compared to competitors registered in other countries where the pollution standards are lax. The EPA also has already exempted about 400 older steamships from having to comply.

Burt says asthma and other chronic conditions are worse in busy port areas because of the smog created by burning bunker fuel.

"After all the petroleum products have been refined out, it's the sludge that remains - really heavy, really contaminated stuff. And they've been using this for a long time, even though engines of all other classes have been forced to run on distillate fuel or Diesel."

The EPA says it will also limit the production and sale of bunker fuel in the U.S. Burt says the agency is asking the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which serves as the "United Nations" of the shipping industry, to approve the rules. The IMO meets again in March.