

Health Department

March 8, 2019

Senate Committee on Environmental and Natural Resources

Re: SB 792 - Relating to auto dismantlers

Chair Senator Dembrow, Vice Chair Senator Olsen, and members of the Committee, my name is Paul Lewis and I am the Health Officer for the Multnomah County Health Department. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for SB 792 which begins to improve the oversight of auto dismantlers across the state.

Just one year ago this month, an auto dismantling operation with a massive number of discarded tires in storage caught fire, engulfing Northeast Portland in black smoke. The smoke from the five-alarm fire could be seen from our neighboring counties and required a multi-agency response, including Multnomah County Public Health. The fire destroyed several residences, covered homes, gardens, and businesses in ash and dust, and damaged the air, water, soil. Businesses were forced to close and both the fire department and then the Health Officer issued evacuation orders downwind of the fire in one of Portland's most racially and ethnically diverse and largely low-income neighborhoods. The risk of living near a poorly regulated industry became an actual nightmare for nearby residents as the fire continued to burn all night long.

Fires from auto salvage yards have a myriad of fine particulate and toxic chemicals (including asbestos, aldehydes, acid gases, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, benzene, toluene, styrene, metals and dioxins). Smoke from these fires can harm people's eyes, irritate their respiratory system, worsen chronic heart and lung diseases, and decrease visibility which causes accidents. Children, the elderly and people with heart and lung problems are at greatest risk from this, and any, smoke exposure. Once ignited, tires melt into a pool of molten oils and chemicals that are infamous for uncontrollable flames, noxious smoke and long duration.

I wish I were here just to warn you that large tire piles near residential areas are a disaster waiting to happen; unfortunately this pile of tires did catch fire and made part of Portland temporarily uninhabitable. At its peak Portland Fire and Rescue had hundreds

Testimony: SB792

of personnel fighting the fire and put so much water on the small area that the runoff needed to be contained yet still the fire burned for over a day.

As the local public health authority, Multnomah County Health Department has concerns about the potential for ongoing environmental and health risks resulting from past and current auto dismantling operations. In order to protect our communities, we support the intention of SB 792 to strengthen oversight of automobile dismantlers so that another uncontrollable tire fire will never again occur near a populated area.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" being more prominent than the last name "Lewis".

Paul Lewis, MD, MPH

Multnomah County Health Officer