

NSW Health
28 October, 2014

White Bay Cruise Terminal – Response to questions raised by the community about health issues

This information has been prepared by NSW Health in response to questions raised at the meetings between Government Agencies, and some community members in Balmain, relating to concerns about health.

What role should NSW Health play in ensuring that operations next to residential areas meet controls?

NSW Health works with the relevant regulatory agencies to assist them in managing health risks associated with environmental pollution.

NSW Health is not an Appropriate Regulatory Authority (ARA) for ensuring developments and sites comply with Planning conditions and/or environmental licences or controls.

For many environmental pollutants, health effects are observed at very low levels of exposure and it is impossible to completely eliminate risks. Air pollution and radiation are examples of this. In these situations NSW Health recommends that reasonable and feasible actions should be taken to minimise community exposure.

What will long term exposure to cruise ship emissions do?

We acknowledge that residents in Balmain have reported health symptoms when ships are in port.

Ship emissions in Sydney contribute to outdoor (ambient) air pollution, along with various sources including motor vehicle traffic, industries and wood heaters. Our understanding of the health impacts of long term exposure to ambient air pollution comes from very large multicity studies. These studies have shown associations between long-term exposure to particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and ozone, and cardiovascular and respiratory mortality. There is little evidence of an association between long-term exposure to SO₂ and adverse health effects. Exposure to NO₂, benzene and other volatile organic compounds is associated with adverse health effects.

The health effects from exposure to ambient air pollution have only been observed at the population level. It is not possible to extrapolate this to the likely impact on any

individual. The average levels of air pollution that have been modelled and measured in the White Bay area are similar to average background levels seen in Sydney. It would be rare for any individual to suffer respiratory or cardiovascular symptoms solely as a result of exposure to cruise ships. However, it is possible that some individuals may be particularly sensitive to air pollution and experience eye, throat and lung irritation.

Several residents have reported unpleasant odours when the ships are berthed. We cannot rule out that odours associated with cruise ships might be associated with some individuals experiencing discomfort and symptoms. The literature in this area states the main effect of environmental exposure to odour is nuisance, but in some cases, it may lead to health effects such as feelings of nausea and headache, especially if the duration and frequency of odour is high.

Given the evidence of health effects from air pollution, NSW Health recommends that reasonable, and feasible actions should be taken to minimise community exposure. NSW Health is working with community representatives, and with other agencies to highlight the need to minimise exposure to noise and air quality as much as possible and to encourage the regulatory authorities to identify solutions.

What steps can be put in place to issue public warnings to the local community with respect to pollution on days when cruise ships are berthed at White Bay?

The levels of air pollution that were modelled in the Environmental Assessment and that have been measured in the White Bay area do not warrant public health warnings.

What should residents with existing chronic respiratory condition do? What should parents do for young children and babies? What should people say to their GP? Can you provide written advice?

In light of modelled and measured air quality, there is no need for any member of the community (including children and people with chronic conditions) to change their daily activities.

If you are concerned about symptoms you should see your GP as many factors can contribute to health conditions.

The regulatory agencies are preparing a fact sheet for the public. NSW Health will have input.