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Air board honors doctor

POLLUTION: CEO began group to take on problem of area children with asthma.

By Kristopher Hanson
Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — A Long Beach physician was honored Wednesday for her work launching a grassroots organization dedicating to helping children with asthma.

Dr. Elisa Nicholas of Miller Children's Hospital is credited with helping raise awareness during the past decade to the disproportionately high rate of asthma among children living in and around San Pedro Bay.

The high asthma rate is blamed on growing pollution from trucks, trains and ships ferrying goods to and from the nation's largest seaport in Long Beach and Los Angeles.

In 1999, Nicholas helped found the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma after noting the growing rate of asthma among youth in and around the city.

Since then, the nonprofit organization has helped fund treatment and outreach for thousands.

The group has also been active in raising

awareness of the health impacts of diesel pollution on young lungs, and urged state authorities to conduct health studies that proved residents in and around San Pedro Bay suffer from the highest asthma rates in California.

Several other individuals and organizations were also honored at Wednesday's luncheon, hosted by the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

"Each of these honorees demonstrated their own clear commitment to cleaner air and took a step beyond by enabling and inspiring others to do the same," said William Burke, chairman of the AQMD's governing board.

Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster was honored at the event in 2007 for supporting clean-air efforts in and around the ports, which air quality regulators list as the largest single fixed source of emissions in California.

Others honored Wednesday include State Sen. Alex Padilla, Energy Control Systems Engineering, University of California, Irvine and the City of Santa Clarita.

Nicholas, CEO of the Children's Clinic, was given the Dr. Robert Zweig Memorial Award. Zweig, who died in 2002, was a longtime Southern California physician who founded an environmental advocacy group, Clean Air Now, after noticing the detrimental effect air pollution was having on his patients' health.