

INCINERATOR ALERT



Incinerators for medical and municipal waste have been linked to severe public health threats and pollution in the United States and Europe. The combination of intense public opposition to incinerators and increasingly strict environmental pollution regulation has forced the closure or cancellation of many incinerators in industrialized countries. Incinerators are fast becoming an obsolete technology as hospitals and cities are moving towards safer and more economical alternative approaches to medical and municipal waste management.

As a result, many incinerator companies are targeting overseas markets where people are not yet aware of the serious health and environmental threats associated with incineration or the many advantages of alternatives. Incinerator companies are now targeting Asia, Africa, and Latin America to sell their toxic technology.

THE DANGERS OF INCINERATION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found medical and municipal waste incineration to be the top sources of severely toxic dioxin, as well as mercury and other toxic substances, in the U.S. environment.

Dioxins and related chlorinated organic compounds are extremely potent toxic substances that produce a remarkable variety of adverse effects in humans and animals at extremely low doses. These compounds are persistent in the environment and accumulate in magnified concentrations as they move up the food chain, concentrating in fat, notably in breast milk. They are distributed globally and are present in every member of the human population. Dioxin is known to cause cancer. Interacting directly with DNA through a receptor-based mechanism, dioxin also acts as an endocrine disruptor with adverse effects on reproduction, development, and the immune system. Developing organisms are particularly susceptible in all species studied, and very small fetal exposures to dioxin frequently have permanent, life-long effects.

Mercury is also bioaccumulative and is toxic to the kidneys and nervous system. Readily converted to its organic form in the environment, mercury interferes with normal brain development. In the United States, current environmental levels of mercury pollution are sufficient to prompt 27 states to advise pregnant women and women of reproductive age not to eat fish caught in local waters.

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HEALTH CARE WITHOUT HARM

In the United States, a national coalition effort of physicians, nurses, patients, scientists, environmental and health advocates, religious institutions, and labor representatives have formed a campaign called Health Care Without Harm: The Campaign for Environmentally Responsible Health Care.

Health Care Without Harm's mission is to transform the health care industry so it is no longer a source of environmental harm by eliminating pollution in health care practices without compromising safety or care. In particular, HCWH is concerned about dioxin and mercury emissions resulting from medical waste incineration. Additional information about the Health Care Without Harm Campaign is available on the Internet at <http://www.noharm.org>

INCINERATORS IN THE SOUTH

As the incinerator market shrinks in the global North, there is a massive rush to build medical waste incinerators in Southern countries. This migration of the incinerator industry is supported by multinational incinerator companies, international financial institutions such as the World Bank and Northern government foreign aid agencies. There are currently plans to build or ship medical waste incinerators to Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Pacific and elsewhere. In order to stop this incinerator invasion, we need to expose proposals for incineration, share information with each other and link together to demand environmentally responsible solutions to medical waste in both the North and South.

If you are concerned about the growing incinerator migration to the South, we invite you to join a network of activists and concerned citizens around the world who are fighting against incineration and for responsible waste management. This network facilitates the interchange of strategies, information and resources.

To join this network, send an email message to action@essential.org providing your name, organization, email address, mailing address, and particular interest in incineration issues so we can be sure to get you the most relevant information. If you do not have email, write to us and we will make sure you are kept informed and connected to other anti-incineration activists.

THE MULTINATIONALS RESOURCE CENTER

The Multinationals Resource Center (MRC) operates a free information clearinghouse about incinerators, pollution, and multinational corporations in less-industrialized countries. If you have any questions about incineration and related issues or would like to join the growing international network against incinerators, please contact MRC (at mrc@essential.org or at the address above) and we will help you get the information you need to keep incinerators out of your community.

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