

INCINERATION: A COSTLY COMMITMENT



Aside from their environmental problems, incinerators are extremely expensive to install and run, yet show little economic return. The modern waste-to-energy incinerator with more sophisticated air pollution control equipment is much more expensive than its predecessors. Annual operating budgets are high, extra expense is involved in generating and delivering energy, and there is also the cost of disposing of the toxic ash.

Contractual obligations to supply a certain tonnage of waste per year to the incinerator can saddle municipalities with financial liabilities if there is a miscalculation in waste generation or a decreasing waste stream, giving them an incentive to maintain the supply of waste or even import it.

Little employment is created for the large capital investment needed, since most of the jobs are temporary ones during the construction of the facility. Much local public money involved is moved out of the area into the hands of multinational engineering firms, financiers, legal teams and consultants.

For example, Seattle, Washington paid at least \$1.325 million to consultants for planning a proposed 2,000 ton-per-day municipal waste incinerator. The consultant also received approximately \$2 million from St. Lawrence County, a poor rural district in New York State. Because of local citizen opposition, neither incinerator was built.

There is little evidence to support claims that placing a rubbish incinerator in a community attracts other companies to site their facilities nearby. If this were the case, there would be much more competition in the U.S. and elsewhere to become the host community for a municipal waste incinerator. Instead, public opinion has tended to resist the establishment of incinerators in local areas. Those who bear the brunt of the risks of the project obtain few economic benefits from doing so.

(Excerpted from *Municipal Waste Incineration: Wrong Question, Wrong Answer*, by Paul and Ellen Connett, *The Ecologist*, Vol.24, No.1, Jan/Feb 1994)