

# QUESTIONS and ANSWERS ABOUT INCINERATION



**Question: *Isn't incineration the solution to the solid waste crisis?***

**Answer:** No. Incineration is not the long-term solution to the solid waste crisis, because it wastes (not recovers) resources. Simply removing and recycling the glass (not to mention the aluminum, office paper, cardboard etc.) from one ton of garbage saves more energy than is  $\frac{1}{2}$ -recovered<sup>2</sup> by the burning the rest of the ton.

**Question: *Won't incinerators remove the need for landfills?***

**Answer:** No. After incineration, up to 40 percent of waste remains, which will require landfilling. Incineration actually perpetuates the use of landfills because of the large quantities of leftover ash produced by incinerators. In addition, this ash is very toxic, containing concentrated amounts of heavy metals and dioxins, which when buried will eventually leach into the soil, thus polluting the groundwater.

**Question: *If incineration will not replace landfills, won't it stretch available landfill space by almost tenfold because it reduces waste volumes by 90 percent?***

**Answer:** No. Often, decision-makers are misled by industry claims that there is a 90 percent volume reduction when garbage is burned in an incinerator and conclude that their dwindling landfill space will stretch 10 times as far. This is not the case. The 90 percent figure refers to a comparison between the waste entering the incinerator and the ash leaving it. It does not include waste that cannot be burned (building debris, old refrigerators, etc.) or that is missed when the facility is closed for repairs, and does not take account of compaction in the landfill. When such factors are taken into account, an incinerator saves somewhere between 60 and 70 per cent of the volume; the landfill space is only stretched 2.5 to three times, not the tenfold increase sometimes implied by promoters of incineration.

**Question: *Isn't it reasonable to require that all hospital waste be incinerated to protect public health against infectious diseases?***

**Answer:** No. Only 10% or less of a typical hospital's waste stream is infectious, and that can be sterilized with heat or microwaves. The remaining waste is not infectious. The paper, plastic, food waste and other hospital waste are similar to the same waste coming from hotels, offices or restaurants, since hospitals serve all of these functions.

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