

HAZARDOUS WASTE INCINERATORS PLAYING WITH FIRE*



- Burning hazardous waste, even in “state-of-the-art” incinerators, releases heavy metals, unburned wastes, and products of incomplete combustion (PICs), i.e., new chemicals formed during the incineration process.
- Metals are not destroyed during incineration and are often released in forms that are more dangerous than the original wastes.
 - ▶ At least 19 metals have been identified in the air emissions of hazardous waste incinerators.
 - ▶ An average-sized commercial incinerator burning hazardous waste with an average metals content emits these metals into the air at the rate of 97,000 kilos and deposits another 304,500 kilos per year of metals in its residual ashes and liquids.
- Unburned chemicals are emitted in the stack gases of all hazardous waste combustion systems. These chemicals also escape into the air as fugitive emissions during storage, transfer and handling.
- Even if an average-sized commercial incinerator achieves 99.99 percent destruction and removal efficiency (DRE) during every second of operation with every chemical in every mixture burned, it releases unburned chemicals at the rate of 3200 kilos per year. PICs (chemicals formed during the incineration process) are emitted in the stack gasses and deposited in the residual ashes and liquids of all hazardous waste incinerators.
 - ▶ According to the U.S. EPA, hazardous waste incinerators release “thousands” of PICs.
- Cancer, birth defects, reproductive dysfunction, neurological damage, and other health effects are known to occur at very low exposures from many of the metals, organochlorines, and other pollutants released by waste-burning facilities.
- Increased cancer rates, respiratory ailments, reproductive abnormalities, and other health effects have been noted among people living near some waste-burning facilities, according to scientific studies in other countries and surveys by community groups and local physicians in the U.S.
- Touted as an alternative to landfilling, incineration perpetuates the dangers of land disposal. U.S. hazardous waste incinerators are producing at least 147 million kilos per year of ash residues. These ashes, which are buried in landfills, are contaminated by PICs, many of which are more toxic than the original waste chemicals. The ashes also contain increased concentrations of heavy metals, often in more leachable forms than in the original wastes.

(*Excerpted from the 1990 Greenpeace report, “Playing with Fire,” by Pat Costner and Joe Thornton)

GAIA

Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives/Global Anti-Incineration Alliance
Unit 320 Eagle Court Condominium, 26 Matalino St., Barangay Central
Quezon City, Philippines
Tel.: + 632 929 0376 Fax: + 632 436 4733
E-mail: info@no-burn.org
www.no-burn.org

RESOURCES ON HAZARDOUS WASTE INCINERATION

ORGANIZATIONS AND JOURNALS

Center for Health, Environment and Justice
P.O. Box 6806
Falls Church, VA 22040 USA
E-mail: cchw@essential.org
www.essential.org/cchw

Southwest Research and Information Center
P.O. Box 4524
Albuquerque, NM 87106 USA
www.sric.org
Publishes quarterly: THE WORKBOOK

Work on Waste
82 Judson Street
Canton, New York 13617 USA
www.workonwaste.org
Publishes 48 times a year: WASTE NOT

Environmental Research Foundation
P.O. Box 5036
Annapolis, MD 21403 USA
Email: erf@rachel.clark.net
www.rachel.org
Publishes: Rachel's Environment & Health Weekly

SUGGESTED READING

THE HAZARDS OF BURNING TOXIC WASTE,
1993
Citizens' Environmental Coalition
33 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12210 USA

PLAYING WITH FIRE: HAZARDOUS WASTE
INCINERATION, 1990
Pat Costner and Joe Thornton
Greenpeace

INCINERATION: THE BURNING
ISSUE, 1998
Center For Health, Environment and Justice

VIDEOS

THE RUSH TO BURN, 1989
(35 minute video)
Greenpeace

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