

WHY YOU SHOULD SAY NO TO INCINERATORS

What are incinerators?

Incinerators are ovens with chimneys. To 'incinerate' means to burn something until only ashes are left over. Incinerators burn waste (rubbish) to ashes. They can be very simple drums, or machines which cost millions of Rands.

Incinerators are used to burn:

- Household rubbish
- Industrial waste (from factories)
- medical waste (from hospitals)

In South Africa, medical waste incinerators are the most common type of incinerators. There are also some industrial (or hazardous) waste incinerators. In SA there are very few incinerators for household waste.

Different names for different types of incinerators are: plasma arc; waste-to-energy and rotary kilns.

Does burning make waste go away?

Some people think that when you burn waste you destroy it. This is wrong. When you burn rubbish it doesn't go away, it changes into something else. Incinerators change waste into:

- (1) toxic gases (poison in the air) and tiny bits which float into the air and make it dirty (air pollution)
- (2) toxic ash and other left-over pieces which must be buried underground, which can make nearby soil and water dirty or poisonous (soil and air pollution).

What is wrong with incinerators?

1. Air Pollution

All types of incinerators cause some air pollution. One incinerator can put as many as 190 different chemicals into the air. Many of these chemicals are very dangerous to our health. Some chemicals can cause cancer.

There are many ways to make incinerators send out less pollution, but there is no way to stop all the pollution.

2. Incineration can make people sick

Incinerator workers and people who live near to incinerators have more health problems. These people get sick easily and they have a high risk of getting cancer. They also may find it difficult to get pregnant and have children.

Many of the substances which come out of incinerators are very poisonous. These chemicals can enter our bodies when we breathe in polluted air, or when we eat food that has been contaminated (touched by dirt or poison). For example: these chemicals can settle on grass, and then cows eat the grass. When we drink the cows' milk or eat beef, these chemicals enter our bodies.

3. Dangerous ash comes out of incinerators

The ash which is left over after waste has been burned in an incinerator is much more poisonous than the waste before it was burned. This is because new substances are made when the waste burns – such as dioxins, furans and heavy metals. This means that incinerator ash still has to be thrown away safely on a special dump for dangerous waste (hazardous landfill site).

4. Incineration does not help people to make less waste

Incinerators need quite a lot of waste every day to keep working. This does not encourage people to make less rubbish. People should be trying to throw fewer things away, so that we do not have a problem trying to get rid of all our rubbish.

5. Incinerators are expensive

Incinerators are very expensive to make. They are also expensive to keep running. They do not make jobs for people in our communities. A lot of money is paid to large private companies or companies from overseas who operate the incinerators. Often this money comes from taxes paid by ordinary people.

There are other ways to deal with waste which can make jobs for people in our communities, such as separating and recycling waste. Money spent like this stays in the community.

6. Most incinerators are in poor areas

Incinerators are usually built in poor communities. In South Africa these are usually black communities. This is because incinerators make pollution. People who are wealthy and educated know that pollution is unhealthy. It is easier for companies to put incinerators in communities where people do not know about the danger. This is called environmental racism.

What do incinerator companies say?

Incinerator companies claim that incinerators reduce the volumes of waste. This is not true. If you put together all the ash, leftovers and dirty air coming out of an incinerator, you would find just as much waste as you put into the incinerator.

Incinerator companies also claim that incineration is cheaper than putting the waste in a proper landfill site. This is only true when the incinerators are very old or very cheap. The older and cheaper the incinerator is, the more poisonous pollution it will make. The air pollution will affect the health of the community. This will cost the community a lot of money in terms of visits to doctors and buying medicine.

What do governments say?

Many countries do not want to incinerate (burn) waste anymore because of all the problems with incinerators. The Philippines government has banned incineration. In America far more incinerators are being closed than are being built. The British government has said that incineration will never be a good way to deal with waste in the future, and that there are no other good ways to use incineration. The South African government has said that we should stop using incinerators, and find different ways to deal with waste.

What can we do?

- Waste avoidance
- Recycling
- Waste reduction
- Re-using
- Composting

People who make the things we buy in shops need to stop using substances which cannot be recycled, reused or composted. Products should be designed to be reused instead of thrown away.

Other safer technologies for treating waste to make it less toxic, such as microwaving and steam sterilization for medical waste.

What else can you do?

- Fight against the development of incinerators in your community.
- Join community organisations which are against incineration
- Go to public meetings and speak out against incinerators
- Teach people not to burn their rubbish
- Buy products which can be re-used or recycled and not get thrown away
- Wherever possible, reuse, recycle, and compost your waste

For more information:

- *groundWork* Tel: 033-342 5662 or e-mail: team@groundwork.org.za
- Western Cape Anti Incineration Alliance (AIA) Alliance c/o EJNF tel: 021- 448 0144 or e-mail thabang@ejnf.org.za
- Earthlife Africa Tel: 011-782 6602 www.earthlife.org.za/
- Global Anti-Incineration Alliance (GAIA): www.no-burn.org
- Greenpeace International: www.greenpeace.org