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RACHEL'S HAZARDOUS WASTE NEWS #215

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Environmental Research Foundation
P.O. Box 5036, Annapolis, MD 21403
Fax (410) 263-8944; Internet: erf@igc.apc.org

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**PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION TAKES STAND AGAINST INCINERATION
OF SOLID WASTE.**

The American Public Health Association (APHA) has issued a policy statement (No. 8911) on the incineration of municipal solid waste. APHA is a nongovernmental professional society founded in 1872 to represent all disciplines and specialties related to public health.

Here is the Association's original statement (except 18 footnotes, which we have omitted):

"The American Public Health Association,

"Recognizing that the United States currently generates about 160 million tons of solid waste a year, that increasing amounts of waste have been generated every year since 1960, and that this trend is expected to continue reaching 193 million tons per year by the year 2000; and

"Recognizing also that one-third of the nation's landfills will be full by 1993 and that current and expected regulatory requirements to upgrade existing landfills will force many to close; and

"Recognizing the seriousness of the current garbage crisis and that the withdrawal of federal support, guidance and grants to states and municipalities since 1980 has led local communities to the dire situation they face today with local landfills closing and no alternatives in place; and

"Recognizing that in this crisis situation many communities are facing enormous and increasing costs for the export of garbage to other towns and states many miles away and that public officials are under great pressure to respond quickly to the crisis without appropriate guidance; and

"Noting that as a result many public officials are embracing garbage incineration as a solution without recognizing that incineration is a poor alternative to landfilling as a waste management option and therefore has significant consequences in terms of environmental pollution and public health; and

"Noting that there are 111 incinerators burning six million tons of municipal garbage now and that there could be 300 facilities burning as much as 25% of the nation's garbage by the mid-1990s; and

"Noting with this trend toward incineration that it is important to address the public health consequences of this choice; and

"Noting that ash residues from incineration contain high levels of heavy metals and dioxin, frequently failing hazardous waste testing, and subsequently require landfilling; and

"Noting that inadequate Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforcement under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) has allowed ash handling to pose significant threats to air and water quality and to human health, especially that of workers; and

"Noting that significant amounts of lead and other heavy metals and dioxins emitted from the stacks of incinerators with either best available control technology (BACT) or the lowest achievable emission rate (LAER); and

"Noting the evidence of increased emissions of heavy metals into the environment, their concentration in the food chain, and the danger to public health; and

"Noting that dioxin uptake and concentration in agricultural products may pose a more significant exposure than ambient air concentration, and the failure to include these estimations in risk assessments for incinerators; and

"Recognizing that many communities across the nation have been identified as non-attainment areas for ozone pollution under the Clean Air Act and that large amounts of nitrogen dioxides, which are ozone precursors, are produced by garbage incinerators and that many of the non-attainment communities are proposing to build garbage incinerators; and

"Noting that the Association has previously addressed the production and disposal of hazardous wastes, as well as the health risks of lead exposure and hazardous air pollutants; and

"Noting that the EPA's Science Advisory Board has expressed concern over the current lack of scientific knowledge concerning municipal waste combustion and that risk assessment and health effects prediction cannot be adequately conducted without this knowledge; and

"Recognizing the global problems of acid rain and global warming and that combustion sources by their nature produce acid gases and what are known as 'greenhouse gases' and that tough choices will be

necessary to address these problems; and

"Recognizing that 80-90 percent of solid waste could be recycled, reduced, reused, or composted, therefore the incineration of garbage is an unnecessary combustion source that should be eliminated early in any rational program to address these global issues; and

"Recognizing the value of conserving natural resources and that considerable quantities of precious resources are currently wasted in several ways, first by being disposed of, secondly by taking up valuable space in landfills, third by polluting our air and our water;

"Noting that the environmental benefits of recycling and reuse go far beyond the mere management of solid waste, such as in substitution of secondary materials for virgin resources in the manufacture of new products which reduces energy and water use and produces less pollution; and

"Noting also that two billion tons of topsoil are lost each year to erosion and mismanagement and that 2030 percent of solid waste is compostable material which after composting could be used to improve agricultural land; and

"Noting that this Association has expressed concern for solid waste management as an essential element of environmental health and pollution control, in addition to the need for conservation of national resources including energy; therefore

"1. Recommends a federal solid waste policy rooted in resource conservation and pollution prevention;

"2. Supports sanctions within the Clean Air Act which would place a construction ban on garbage incinerators within all non-attainment areas where such incinerators would contribute to the non-attainment status;

"3. Supports an amendment to RCRA which promotes the use of the least toxic alternative in product composition, and secondarily the alternatives which are most reusable, most recyclable, most durable, or most biodegradable as appropriate. In this context biodegradability must address the issue of toxic residues remaining after degradation. This amendment should promote the minimization of waste at all points of transfer from raw material to consumer and [sic] product;

"4. Supports legislation which promotes the use of recycled materials over virgin materials through fees, taxes or price supports and tax credits, and provides incentives to businesses that engage in recycling and encourages market development;

"5. Supports federal, state, and local procurement guidelines for government contractors which enable product life and ability to be repaired to be considered in procurement decisions;

"6. Supports research in problem areas of waste management such as battery recycling, household

hazardous waste collection and recycling possibilities, and further research into waste composition to identify problem items not yet addressed in waste reduction legislation;

"7. Recommends that the EPA assist local communities to develop and implement intensive recycling and composting plans to handle 80% of the waste stream through technical assistance, planning grants, and incentives to successful programs.

"8. Supports the designation of incinerator ash residues as hazardous unless comprehensive testing proves otherwise;

"9. Supports extensive research and monitoring of existing facilities to establish a database and develop stringent regulatory standards; and

"10. Asks the EPA and other research bodies to identify research and to develop interim guidance for existing incineration which is protective of public health."

Get: "Resource and Solid Waste Management," AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH Vol. 80 (February, 1990), pgs. 230-231.

--Peter Montague, Ph.D.

Descriptor terms: american public health assoiation; landfilling; incineration; MSW; ash; epa; rcra; heavy metals; health effects; legislation;

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