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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB488

Communities living in the shadow of the tall smokestack of the Covanta Marion incinerator have asked the State Legislature and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to strengthen air toxics emission standards for this facility. Covanta Marion is the 4th largest incinerator in the nation that still burns untreated medical waste. Covanta brings in more than 50% of the medical waste it burns from out-of-state. The combustion of this waste is responsible for dangerous emissions of dioxin, lead, mercury, cadmium, dozens of volatile organic compounds, climate-driving gasses, and more. However, the Oregon DEQ regulates the incinerator under very weak rules. Senate Bill 488 will require the DEQ to adopt more health protective federal air pollution standards for incinerators that burn a large amount of medical waste.

Why is it important to take action to reduce air toxic pollution from large waste incinerators like Covanta Marion?

Medical waste incineration is more toxic than municipal waste, due to a higher percentage of plastics, and because the plastics in medical waste contain more polyvinyl chlorides (PVCs). This leads to higher levels of toxic air emissions, particularly dioxin and lead.

The US EPA guidelines provide for greater control technology and lower emissions limits for medical waste incinerators because of the toxicity of their emissions. Covanta Marion is currently regulated under emissions standards for municipal waste (i.e., city trash) incinerators, rather than the more stringent standards for large medical waste incinerators.

Oregon law currently has a large loophole that allows the Covanta incinerator to exceed EPA guidelines for safe emissions levels for new, large medical waste incinerators.

We need to close this regulatory loophole to protect our air quality and public health.

Oregon's mid-Willamette Valley should not be the dumping ground for toxic medical waste from other states and countries. Other states export their waste to Oregon so that it is "out of sight and out of mind." As a result, Oregonians have to breathe more toxic air.

Communities that are impacted by Covanta's dirty air emissions are environmental justice communities in the Northeast Salem and Woodburn areas. Communities of color have stood up to protest pollution from incineration as one of the movement's original environmental justice issues.