

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 488 Closing the Medical Waste Loophole

To: Senate Energy and Environment Committee
From: Prof. Janet Lorenzen
Re: Support for SB 488

Chair Sollman; Vice Chair Findley; and members Sen. Golden, Sen. Hayden,
and Sen. Lieber,

My name is Prof. Janet Lorenzen and I live in Salem, 10 miles away from the Covanta Marion incinerator. I am testifying on behalf of the 300 members of 350Salem, as well as concerned faculty and students at Willamette University.
We support SB 488 The Medical Waste Incinerator Act.

I want to **close the loophole** that allows the Covanta Marion Incinerator in Brooks, Oregon to burn medical waste and yet not be regulated under the stricter standards of a medical waste incinerator. The Covanta Marion incinerator currently burns over 6 times the amount of medical waste that the EPA allows for a large medical waste incinerator! **They should be regulated based on what they do, it's common sense.**

When it was built, the Covanta Marion incinerator was sold to Marion County as a local, municipal waste incinerator, but the new owners have done a **bait and switch**. Between 2019 and 2021 it has imported more and more medical and industrial waste to burn in Marion County from as far away as Georgia and Canada. Comparing the amount burned in 2020 to 2021 shows a 21.6% increase in the amount of medical waste burned (11,648 tons to 14,168 tons). **European investors make more money, yet the electricity produced is so expensive it often goes out of state (11 cents per kilowatt hour), and the Willamette Valley is left with air pollution, toxic ash, and health care costs.**

Cleaner Air Oregon's strictest permit would not be as strict as the new federal rules for large medical waste incinerators. That the EPA has stricter regulations for medical waste proves that it is more dangerous and needs more careful regulation. Covanta Marion can burn medical waste with or without this bill. The bill gives us **guardrails** to protect our health and address an **environmental racism sacrifice zone**. Many of the people who live nearest to the incinerator are low-income, Latinx folks, with low English proficiency, and little access to political representation.

For years Covanta Marion has been a bad actor, not a good neighbor. For the last couple of years Covanta has delayed giving data to DEQ. They have stalled, asked for extensions, had to re-do tests because they lacked accuracy, and once even turned in data from a newer incinerator in Canada on the date when their own data was due to be turned in to DEQ. **If I was grading their work, I would turn them in for plagiarism and then give them an F.**

[Incineration is on the decline. Many states have stopped burning their medical waste and instead sanitize it or use autoclaves.](#) Many hospitals have also done waste audits and realized that the medical waste that requires special handling is only 1-3% of their waste stream (3% at Salem Hospital). Oregon requires that pathological waste be burned, that's 1% of hospital waste. **Under the constraints of this bill, Covanta Marion could easily accept all of the medical waste that is required to be burned from Marion county and stay under the cap for safely burning medical waste.**

When I consulted with Prof. Joe Bowersox, he said that many years ago the former owners of Covanta Marion planned to switch how they were regulated, from a municipal waste incinerator to a medical waste incinerator, in order to accept more medical waste and increase profits. The new owners of Covanta Marion have accepted increasing amounts of medical waste from out of state without making this change. We ask that you make it for them. **This is not a new program, simply an adjustment to an existing program to protect the health of Oregonians.**

I urge you to pass SB 488 in the 2023 legislative session to ensure that the loop hole is closed and that Oregon does not become a dumping ground for other states' medical and industrial waste.

Thank you,

Dr. Janet Lorenzen
Associate Professor of Environmental Sociology
Willamette University