

Submitter: Joel Geier

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure: SB488

As a rural resident in north Benton County, I urge you to please support SB 488.

Covanta's incinerator should be required to meet US EPA standards for medical-waste incinerators, if it continues to process large quantities of medical waste from far-away places. Medical waste is high in PVC, which results in ash that is high both in dioxins and in the heavy metals used as "stabilizers" in PVC, including lead and cadmium.

The benefit to rural residents in the Brooks/Gervais area, by protecting their air quality, is reason enough to support this bill -- especially knowing that many residents and agricultural workers in that area are economically disadvantaged.

But there is also a connection for the health and well-being of rural residents across the Willamette River, where I live. This is because ash from the Covanta incinerator is trucked daily to the Coffin Butte landfill, some of it for disposal as waste, but also for use as "alternatively daily cover" in place of clean fill dirt.

In other words, the landfill operators are piling ASH ON TOP OF TRASH in layers like a wedding cake -- but not one that anyone would want to sample.

So for rural residents in north Benton County and south Polk county, wind-blown dust from incinerator ash that billows off the landfill on dry days is a concern -- all the more so if it includes residue from medical waste.

But that's not the end of the story. On wet days, rainwater seeps down into the pile of ash & trash. It percolates down through the whole pile until it comes out the bottom as landfill "leachate." A better word for it might be GARBAGE TEA -- a regular cocktail full of dissolved toxic chemicals, which then needs to be drained off and disposed of, before it seeps into our groundwater. The landfill generates 32 million gallons per year of this yuck.

Not quite half of that -- 15 million gallons per year -- is hauled to the Corvallis wastewater treatment plant. This plant is designed for regular municipal sewage, not for landfill leachate. So most of the dioxins, heavy metals, and other chemicals that leach out of Covanta ash and end up in leachate are likely also being discharged into the Willamette River. The discharge point for the Corvallis plant is just a few miles upstream from Hyak Park, where our neighbors in Adair Village draw their drinking water.

In other words, residents of north Benton County and south Polk County have three routes by which we can be affected by the Covanta incinerator: air pollution from the incinerator itself, contaminated dust from incinerator ash, and contaminated water from landfill leachate.

The rest of the landfill's leachate -- about 17 million gallons per year -- gets hauled to Salem, where it is dumped into the city's regular sewage system, eventually going to the Willow Lake treatment plant in Keizer. Again, this plant is not equipped to handle the contaminants that come from Covanta ash and end up in landfill leachate.

So once again, the problem gets transferred to downstream communities, as well as aquatic life in our beloved Willamette River.

Covanta's practice of incinerating medical waste under the current weak limits on emissions is impacting residents in rural areas and small towns throughout the mid-Willamette Valley, even beyond the areas around Brooks that are most directly impacted.

It is both sensible and appropriate to require the Covanta plant to meet the US EPA's standards for medical waste incinerators. Please vote yes on this bill, to protect the health and future of rural communities in the Willamette Valley.