

**DEB PATTERSON  
STATE SENATOR/SENADORA ESTATAL  
DISTRICT 10/DISTRITO 10**



**OREGON STATE SENATE/SENADO DEL ESTADO DE OREGON**

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Deb Patterson, and I am the State Senator for District 10, representing South and West Salem, Monmouth and Independence. I am here today to urge your support for SB 488, to close the loophole on the incineration of medical waste in Oregon.

The State of Oregon has one large waste incinerator, which is located just north of Salem. The facility is classified as a municipal waste incinerator but burns both municipal, industrial and medical waste.

Medical waste incineration has a different risk profile than burning municipal waste. Medical waste includes materials such as syringes, gloves, and medical tubing, and contains a higher percentage of plastic than municipal waste. The types of plastics in medical waste contain more polyvinyl chloride or PVC, which emits higher levels of toxic compounds when burned.

Because of hazardous pollution associated with medical waste, EPA emissions guidelines are stricter for medical waste incinerators than for municipal waste incinerators. Oregon's large municipal waste incinerator currently burns medical waste in an amount which, according to EPA regulations, would classify it as a large medical waste incinerator. However, because the facility burns both medical and household waste, it is regulated as a municipal, rather than a medical, waste incinerator. This is the loophole we must close to help keep the air we breathe safe.

Colleagues, for nearly a decade after my retirement from working as a healthcare administrator, I served in a congregation a few miles downwind from this incinerator. Over the course of 8 years, in this church with 100 members, I buried 30 people. Nearly all of them died from cancer – throat cancers, breast cancers, esophageal cancers, pancreatic cancers, prostate cancers among them. And many more have gone through cancer treatments or are doing so right now. I have buried babies who were born with severe neurological challenges and who lived only a few days or weeks. I realize that many things contribute to the development of neurological deficits and cancers, and I am not implying a direct causation, but we need to do what we can to be sure that the air we are breathing and the water we are drinking is safe. The least we can do is meet EPA regulations for disposal of our waste.

SB 488 would close the aforementioned loophole by requiring incinerators that burn medical waste to be classified as medical waste incinerators. This is a necessary step to protect Oregon's air quality and community health from the hazardous emissions associated with burning this waste.

Colleagues, I urge your support on SB 488.

*Deb Patterson*