



On behalf of South West Devon Waste Partnership

For immediate issue

17 May 2009

In response to the Friend of the Earth statement:

Since the partnership formed in September 2007, communication and consultation has been a key priority. Nine roadshows were staged in November 2008 across SW Devon and were well attended. Comments and more information are on the website swdwp.co.uk. Further exhibitions are planned for this summer, and in any case, a full public consultation would have to take place before planning permission or any development could take place.

1. FOE refers to Energy from Waste as 'incineration facilities'. The incineration element is only one component in the EfW system, which also recovers energy in the form of electricity and heat. The term embraces a wide range of processes, including conventional incineration, gasification and pyrolysis, anaerobic digestion of organic material and the creation of a substance known as a refuse derived fuel.

Energy from waste plants use proven technology and are reliable. The costs are known and the emissions well within the Waste Incineration Directive limits. Such plants recover heat and power for local use, ensure contributions to landfill diversion targets are fully met and are usually the most cost effective way of treating residual waste. Energy recovered from the process displaces the need for energy to be produced by fossil fuels elsewhere, which has clear environmental benefits in terms of CO₂ savings (called "offsetting").

2. The operation of a modern EfW plant is not harmful to human health. Any type of health issue is a vital consideration and these have been diligently researched by numerous independent authorities and experts. Some people have alleged detrimental health issues associated with energy from waste plants. These claims have undergone rigorous examination and there is no proven link between the operation of EfW plants and human health. As a result, there is a high degree of confidence in the way modern waste to energy plants work.

This stands to reason, as a quick look at the stringent emission levels set by the European Waste Incineration Directive (WID) to which EfW plants must operate will demonstrate. These limits make incineration one of the most tightly regulated industries in the EU. Dispersion models and field testing show concentrations of the trace elements of pollutants emitted are well within air quality parameters and limits.

In 2005 the Health Protection Agency issued a position statement on incineration operated to modern standards which concluded that "emissions from such incinerators have little effect on health."

The 2005 HPA report also pointed out that the Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has reviewed a large study by the Small Area Health Statistics Unit that examined 14 million people living within 7.5 km of 72 municipal solid waste incinerators, which operated up to 1987. The Committee concluded that, "any potential risk of cancer due to residency (for periods in excess of ten years) near to municipal solid waste incinerators was exceedingly low and probably not measurable by the most modern techniques". This large study - which was almost exhaustive for the UK at the time - was conducted on plants operating to the old emission standards, so it is not surprising that the modern plants are not assessed as being harmful.

3. Great care is taken to ensure that Energy from Waste plants are sized so that they do not inhibit or discourage levels of recycling and composting that can be achieved. What we have to deal with is that proportion of the waste which cannot economically be recycled or composted. Recovery of energy is seen as a sensible way of getting value from waste materials that otherwise would have no value. In addition, efforts are being made to encourage the reduction and reuse of waste via the Don't let Devon go to waste campaign and working in partnership with the community sector. It has been shown in Europe that high levels of energy from waste and high levels of recycling go hand in hand.

The policies adopted by Plymouth, Devon and Torbay seek to recover as much useful material from the waste stream as possible. If the material has no value, then surely it is better to recover the energy from that material rather than bury it in a landfill.

4. There are carefully laid down international guidelines as to how greenhouse gas emissions should be assessed. Undertaking a complete analysis of the contributing factors (which include the plant emissions, those from vehicles used to transport waste, offsets from other ways of generating electricity and the fact that despite being capped, landfills leak carbon dioxide and methane gas), show that far from increasing climate change, the net effect of an EfW plant can show a reduction of between 28% and 42% in greenhouse gases depending on the technology utilised. Environmental groups tend to interpret the statistics and contributing factors in a

different way, and tend to restrict their considerations to the plant emissions only, seeming reluctant to take a global view.

As regards pollution, EfW plants operate to an extremely high standard, contributing very little to the overall inventory of airborne substances. This can be shown by a comparison of the relevant WID limits to well known and commonplace activities such as fireworks, road traffic, steelworks, fossil fuel power stations and other industrial processes.

The argument produced by environmentalists that EfW plants “waste natural resources” is based on an assumption that something close to 100% recycling can be achieved. This is not realistic. Even the best countries in the world achieve only about 60% when compared in an equivalent manner with the UK. Therefore, this residual waste goes to landfill (at present) and would not be recovered.

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For more information, visit www.swdwp.co.uk

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Notes to Editors.

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