

To Metro Vancouver Board and Directors:

I saw the Metro Vancouver presentation on waste to energy incineration and I believe the environmental comparison between options is very misleading. For example staff said that the level of nanoparticles coming out of the smokestack is less than the ambient level. The problem with this statistic is that you are comparing apples with oranges. The ambient nanoparticles in the air are made up mostly of fine dust and pollen from natural sources and are for the most part harmless. Whereas the nanoparticles coming out of the smokestack are the byproduct of burning a wide variety of plastics and organics and are loaded with potentially highly toxic compounds including dioxins, heavy metals, mercury and cadmium. Because of the highly unpredictable mix of garbage even the best scientists could not predict what other chemical compounds are created, much less test for them. Speaking of testing, the particles are so fine they can't be tested. Furthermore the reason nanoparticles are so much of a concern is that they are so fine they not only get past the smokestack filters, they also bypass the human body's natural defences when you breathe it in so it reaches the lungs and gets right into the bloodstream. That is why air pollution can be so serious and nanoparticles in particular. The seriousness of the nanoparticles will vary greatly depending on what the nanoparticles are made of. The presentation also based its environmental comparison on the assumption that air emissions of incineration would be offset by the energy it creates so that you would end up with negative net emissions, ie. less emissions than if you don't burn because they say people will burn less fuel when they heat their house if they are using energy from the WTE plant. But again they are comparing apples to oranges. We know what byproducts are created from burning natural gas but those will be very different from the toxic stew created by an incinerator. Ton for ton there may be less emissions if you believe the calculations (which I don't necessarily) but you are comparing typical natural gas emissions (which is one of the cleanest burning fuels) with something far far worse, so it is not an equal trade and not a proper comparison. You may have a 100 less tons of emissions of natural gas but you trade it for 80 tons of emissions composed of a potentially highly toxic chemical cocktail made from burning garbage. If you have ever been to Europe you will know how badly the air is polluted there. I have asthma and a good sense of smell so I was quite shocked when I went there and saw how bad it was. Vancouver should not be going down this road so we can be just like them. BC has far lower cancer rates than back east and Europe but if we start to burn our garbage and put toxic chemicals in the air like Europe does we may end up with the same cancer rates as well.

Air pollution is very insidious because it is easy to ignore when it is not visible. But any marijuana smoker understands that when you breathe in chemicals (like THC) through your lungs, they travel throughout your body and into your brain within a minute. Your body doesn't necessarily screen out the chemicals you don't want and let through the chemicals you do want. By putting our garbage into the air we will ALL be exposed to it at different levels, our children, our grandchildren, babies. If you bury it up in Cache creek our children will not be exposed to it at all. That is one comparison that matters the most to me and it is the one comparison that Metro staff did not make.

Metro Vancouver now has some of the cleanest drinking water in the world. Now is the time to try to have the cleanest air but this proposal takes us in the complete opposite direction. I fully support the City of Vancouver's attempt to make Vancouver the greenest city. By burning waste and putting chemicals in the air for all to breathe you are completely undermining that effort.

I know you are claiming that there are no proven health impacts from incineration but that is where the nature of the problem doesn't allow for scientific proof. When people get cancer, it doesn't carry a tag with it saying where it came from. Any person who gets cancer we never know what caused it for certain. We can infer it but we don't know by any standard of proof acceptable in a courtroom. Cancer isn't like the flu where you can test a person and tell the name of the virus that caused the flu. Instead we know dioxins cause cancer. We know people are breathing dioxins and dying of cancer but we can not point to a person and say that person's cancer was caused by dioxins breathed from a smokestack. Tobacco industry scientists have taken advantage of this fact for decades. They can say with conviction that there is not a

single case of person that was proven to have gotten cancer from smoking. It was only through widespread epidemiological studies over decades that scientists were able to show a conclusive link between smoking and cancer but they still cannot say conclusively say that one person's cancer was definitely caused by smoking cigarettes.

In light of the nature of the problem we should be taking the precautionary approach and should not be putting a potentially toxic cocktail of chemicals in the air for us all to breathe. In parts of the world which are already heavily polluted, they may not care as much but I hope that we in Vancouver will care. We have become one of the best places in the world to live because we are different. Let's not change that by making the environmental mistakes that other places (with land shortages and less options) have chosen to make.

Submitted by Paul Hundal  
West Vancouver, BC