

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

**Green Member of the European Parliament
for the South East of the UK**

20 April 2004

Commissioner Margot Wallstrom
Environment Commissioner
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049

Dear Commissioner,

Re: Incineration and air quality near Colnbrook, Slough, Berkshire

I am writing to express my concern at the possible construction of two new incinerators in the county of Berkshire.

There has been an incinerator in Colnbrook which has been burning municipal waste for over 10 years. My concern is that a much larger incinerator will be active in 3 to 4 years time and this will burn 50 times more waste - taking municipal, clinical and military waste from sites around the country, including radioactive material. This will result in an increase from burning 1 ton per hour presently to burning 54 tons per hour - thereby making it one of the biggest incinerators in the United Kingdom.

The Colnbrook incinerator will produce annual pollution equivalent to approximately five million diesel cars travelling one kilometre but with a crucial difference. The pollutants will be far more toxic and it will be continuous – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

I am particularly concerned about the concentrations of the most hazardous fractions of the particulate matter PM2.5s, nitrogen dioxide and the highly dangerous and carcinogenic heavy metals (nickel, arsenic, cadmium, beryllium, lead, mercury) as well as VOCs and radioactive substances. Emissions from incinerators also contain a high proportion of even smaller particles, PM1 and below.

The World Health Organisation in 1994 declared that there are no safe limits for inhaling PM2.5s. USEPA stated that levels should be below 15mcg/M3.

In 1978 two Yale University researchers estimated that 140,000 deaths each year were related to all forms of metallic air pollution compounds. In October 2000 the US Clean Air Task Force published evidence that revealed 30,000 premature deaths were caused from PM2.5s released from power stations. They only included cardiac and respiratory deaths so this is an underestimate.

Two large cohort studies showed increasing mortality with increased PM2.5s. The Six Cities Study found an excess mortality of 26% for an increase of PM2.5 of 18.6mcg/m2 and the ACS studies found an increase in mortality of 17% for a 24.5mcg/m2 difference.

The WHO has shown that daily mortality, hospital admissions and asthmatic symptoms rise much more rapidly with rises in PM2.5 levels than with rises in PM10 levels. It has also been shown that the association between air pollution and daily mortality is due to fine combustion particles (Occup Environ Med 2000;57(10) 692-7). Indeed, a vast amount of research has shown that 18 different diseases are linked with inhalation of PM2.5s.

Given that the air quality standards in this region of Berkshire for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter are not currently met close to major roads, including the M4 and M25, and Heathrow Airport, it is essential that the Commission intervene to prevent the construction of the incinerators. Furthermore, it is crucial that the Commission urgently sets limit values for PM2.5s.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Lucas MEP