

Press release

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New incinerator pollution report released

A new report released today by the Particulate Research Group highlights misleading statements made by the Government about the health dangers posed by waste incinerators.

The report, entitled 'Particulates Matter: Are emissions from incinerators safe to breathe?' - available at: <http://ukwin.org.uk/particulates> - is based on an analysis of Government answers to many dozens of Parliamentary Questions asked by Dr David Drew, then MP for Stroud, about particulate matter emitted by municipal waste incinerators.

The evidence shows how Government Ministers omitted important caveats and provided incomplete information – resulting in criticism that the Government misled Parliament.

The Particulate Research Group (PRG), convened by Ron Bailey and chaired by Dr David Drew, comprises eminent scientists Professors Mike Reeks and Vyvyan Howard, alongside Shlomo Downen of the UK Without Incineration Network (UKWIN).

The PRG found numerous shortcomings in the Government's regulation of emissions from municipal waste incinerators and gaps in the Government's research and assessments.

The report raises concerns that by focussing their attention on the mass of particles released by incinerators instead of the number of particles released by incinerators the Government is failing to do their utmost to protect the public.

According to Dr David Drew:

"I've been working with scientists over the last two years to look at the potential dangers of incinerators. Scientific evidence has shown that the real dangerous impact of incineration comes from the smallest particles, PM0.1 and PM1, because they are absorbed into the bloodstream through the lungs. These particles are too small to be filtered and are therefore emitted directly into the air that we breathe. The Government has refused to recognise this."

Ron Bailey, convener of the Particulate Research Group, said:

"Parliamentary questioning has exposed the dangers of municipal waste incinerators which may constitute a serious threat to public health. It is vital that the public be made aware of these issues, particularly those living in the vicinity of an incinerator."

In the words of Mike Reeks, Professor Emeritus of Fluid Mechanics, Newcastle University and Visiting Professor at the Department of Aeronautics, Imperial College:

“This work on the public health hazards of incineration of municipal solid waste, both locally and nationally, is extremely important. In his work as MP, David Drew has challenged the Government on the inadequacy of its regulations on emissions and its failure to recognise how hazardous these emissions are to health.”

Vyvyan Howard, Emeritus Professor of Nano Systems Biology at the Centre for Molecular Bioscience, University of Ulster, explained how:

“A large proportion of the particles passing through the filters are Ultra Fine Particles (UFPs). Epidemiological studies worldwide have consistently demonstrated links between ambient particulate matter exposure and adverse health outcomes, including increased rates of respiratory and cardiovascular illness, hospitalizations, and premature mortality. Studies have shown that ultrafine particles are more toxic than larger particles.

“Furthermore, individual particles have been shown to be capable of inducing inflammation and oxidative stress. Estimates of the number of excess deaths on a global scale due to particle inhalation have been made, and they amount to about two million deaths per year of which c.370,000 per year are within the EU. The health effects are not limited to lung injuries; they also include five cardiovascular diseases and cancers. Recent research has shown that particles coming out of municipal waste incinerators are more toxic than those produced by biomass burning.

“The bag filter systems on municipal waste incinerators cut out the larger particles and produce an aerosol of the smallest particles, which are precisely those that are most hazardous to health. This is likely to have long-term health impacts on communities in the vicinities of waste incinerators.”

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