



# TO THE PEOPLE OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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We're writing to tell you about a new threat to our environment here in Aotearoa New Zealand. It's one you may not be aware of, but one that will affect you and could involve you in damaging our land, water and air. It's called waste-to-energy incineration and it'll be here soon unless we stop it.

Right now, international corporations are touring New Zealand to convince our councils to build waste-to-energy incinerators. They tried and failed in Westport. Now they've got their eyes on Hokitika. We hear they're also visiting other councils and looking to convert Huntly Power Station into an incinerator, which would be terrible for both Auckland and Hamilton.

To give you some background, waste-to-energy incinerators burn waste to produce electricity. Although that sounds like a great idea, incinerators have many problems that people aren't aware of. We know our councils want to do the right thing, but we're concerned that incineration companies aren't telling the whole story. So we want to set the record straight.

## INCINERATORS RELEASE DANGEROUS CHEMICALS

In the past, incinerators were highly polluting facilities that pumped huge volumes of toxic pollutants into our skies. It's true that today's incinerators are much cleaner, but they're still not perfect. Toxins that come out of incinerators include dioxins, mercury and cadmium that can cause cancer, nerve damage and birth defects. Anyone who lives downwind from an incinerator is in danger of breathing in these dangerous chemicals. Toxins also fall on the land to be eaten by livestock or washed into our rivers, harbours and coastal waters where they become part of our food chain.

## INCINERATORS RELEASE GREENHOUSE GASES

While these toxins are dangerous, most of the gas coming from an incinerator is carbon dioxide. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that each tonne of waste burnt produces up to 1.2 tonnes of carbon dioxide<sup>1</sup>. As we're sure you know, we're looking for ways to urgently reduce our climate change emissions. Waste-to-energy incinerators work in direct competition with this goal.

## INCINERATORS CREATE HAZARDOUS WASTE

Incinerator companies regularly talk about the many uses for incinerator bottom ash (IBA), including in building, roading and construction. However, researchers have raised serious questions about IBA leaching heavy metals into the environment. [Numerous studies](#)<sup>2</sup> have shown that heavy metals can be released from IBA and be washed into the surrounding environment (see footnotes 5,17-19 in linked study). This poses a particular threat because heavy metals are highly toxic even at low concentrations.

The fly ash from incineration would require a special waste landfill due to the concentrations of heavy metals. Its safe disposal usually involves additional waste miles and the need for specialist toxic waste landfill elsewhere.

## INCINERATORS DESTROY VALUABLE RESOURCES

Leaving aside air pollution, incinerators destroy valuable, non-renewable resources. Governments, businesses and communities everywhere are looking for ways to encourage people to reduce, reuse, repair, refurbish and recycle the things we use so we can conserve resources. Incinerators work directly against these efforts.

## INCINERATORS ARE LESS EFFICIENT THAN COAL

While incineration companies are happy to point out that the waste they burn would be sent to landfill, they don't mention that household waste is not a very good fuel. The World Energy Council found that, kilogram for kilogram, waste produces less than half the energy of coal and less than one-third the energy of natural gas<sup>3</sup> while producing many times the amount of pollution. Here in Aotearoa, we currently produce about 80% of our electricity from renewable sources, and we have a plan to increase that to 100% by 2035<sup>4</sup>. Waste-to-energy incinerators compete with our renewable energy goals and undermine our commitment to a low emissions economy.

## INCINERATORS DESTROY JOBS

But maybe one of the biggest deceptions incinerator companies use to sell their products is that incinerators create jobs. The EU social enterprise reuse, repair and recycling group, RREUSE, recently looked into that and found that for every job an incinerator creates, recycling centres could create 36 jobs, and reuse activities could create 296 jobs. Resource recovery and recycling services are set to become the number one fastest growing sector as our country moves towards a circular economy. Incinerators destroy this potential.

## INCINERATORS DISCOURAGE ZERO WASTE EFFORTS

As a collective of organisations committed to the principle of zero waste, we recognise incinerators as one of the most destructive waste management methods. While we accept that waste is a problem, we know that incinerators aren't the answer. Waste-to-energy incineration is a non-renewable source of energy that destroys our precious finite natural resources. We believe we can address our waste issues in a more constructive way that preserves resources, prevents pollution and creates jobs.

You can help protect our environment from further damage by letting your councillors know that you don't want an incinerator built in your region and supporting those groups against these projects around the country. You can find resources to support your conversations at [www.zerowaste.co.nz](http://www.zerowaste.co.nz)

Signed,



Marty Hoffart  
Chair, ZWN



Gareth Cartwright  
Executive Officer



Jacqui Forbes  
General Manager



Kathryn Lawlor  
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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ipcc-nggip.iges.or.jp/public/gp/bgp/5\\_3\\_Waste\\_Incineration.pdf](https://www.ipcc-nggip.iges.or.jp/public/gp/bgp/5_3_Waste_Incineration.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/heavy-metal-removal-from-incineration-bottom-ash-through-washing-with-rainwater-and-seawater-2252-5211-1000203.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/World-Energy-Resources-Full-report-2016.10.03.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.iccc.mfe.govt.nz/what-we-do/energy/>