

WHY LEEDS SHOULD NOT BE CHAINED TO WASTE INCINERATION

On 2nd November the Executive Board will be asked to make a decision on who should build a waste incinerator in Leeds. This decision will effectively lock and chain Leeds City Council into a contract for burning 50% of the domestic waste produced in the City for next 25 years.

This is why the Council should not approve a waste incinerator for Leeds:

1. An Incinerator will tie the Council down to a contract which will have to guarantee a minimum level of waste for the incinerator each year. Councils such as Sheffield with similar contracts who have not produced enough waste have had to rely on imports from other areas or increased levels of commercial waste to feed incinerators. In Hampshire, Veolia (one of the bidders for the Leeds contract) applied to vary the plants' planning conditions to allow them to process more commercial waste and, potentially, import waste from outside the county due to a shortage of municipal waste. No one can accurately predict the quantity or make up of waste for the next 25 years. Waste levels have been falling steadily, such a contract even with safeguards is foolhardy.

2. Incinerators reduce incentives to Reduce and Reuse and suppress demand for local Recycling as residents see less need to separate and recycle their waste. Leeds has set a recycling target of 50% which will be effectively locked in for the next 25 years. Other authorities are already exceeding this level and have set much higher and progressive targets. Leeds is also now lagging behind most other UK cities including Bradford and Hull with their current recycling rates. With an incinerator there will be an in built disincentive to raise the bar.

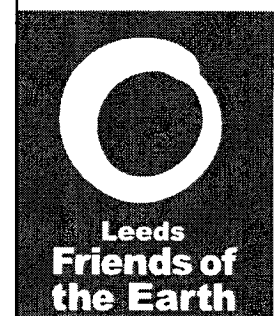
3. Incineration releases high levels of climate change-causing gases including CO₂, more than other processing technologies. To build an incinerator would be counter the Councils own climate change action plan and commendable targets for reducing its carbon footprint.

4. Incineration does not eradicate land fill. We estimate that in the region of 150,000 tonnes of toxic, concentrated, mixed domestic and industrial hazardous ash, will be produced over the contract period. It will need to be loaded onto lorries and transported through Leeds to special land fill sites. The Council's own Waste Strategy is to achieve Zero Waste this will impossible for 25 years if the incinerator is built. The incinerator will also produce in the region of 300,000 tones of, in theory non toxic ash, which can be used in buildings. However some construction companies have banned their use after finding contamination and instability in the material.

5. Waste Incineration poses significant health risks. Although modern incinerators use expensive filter systems, they still emit significant levels of NO_x and ultrafine particles. These nano-particles can pass through the lung lining, causing internal inflammation and penetration into organs. There is no doubt that incinerators produce combined chemical compounds. The argument is whether the amounts are harmful and what they are likely to mix with in the atmosphere. Incinerator licenses do not cover emission levels, during start-up and close-down which can be the heaviest polluting periods. The Council should adopt a precautionary principle and not accept a new industrial development which releases hazardous chemicals into the atmosphere.



No Incineration Leeds is a coalition of Leeds based organizations and local residents who oppose waste incineration as a means to deal with residual waste.



6. Incinerators are prone to breakdowns and the nature of an operation that burns mixed materials at high temperature and produces steam at high pressures creates risk. In September 2006 the Kirklees incinerator suffered a serious incident that put it out of action for several weeks. The operator said "significant damage" was caused by a serious mechanical failure causing extensive damage and "Boiler tube problems are not uncommon in Energy from Waste plants due to the high temperature environment in which they are working." A local councillor reported "The incident was so serious that the Huddersfield water system couldn't handle the needs of the fire services, which is why they pumped water from the local canal."

7. A Waste Incinerator would require hundreds of lorry loads of pretreated and post treated domestic and industrial waste to be transported across the city every week to a single point. This will have a detrimental impact on traffic congestion and local air quality.

8. Compared to reuse and recycling incinerators create few jobs (typically while operating just one job per year of operation) and little in the way of additional income or contracts for other companies in the local economy.

9. Incinerators are often justified on the basis of energy production. However it is a very inefficient way to produce power. They often require gas to be burnt to create heat to dry out unsuitable materials to make them burn. The electricity produced will bring no direct benefit to Leeds as will go direct into the national grid. Massive amount of waste heat will be produced which cannot be economically captured and used. If the point was to produce energy there are far better ways of doing it.

10. The two companies that Leeds has left to choose from to build the plant pose significant risks for similar and different reasons. Veolia recently announced they are in financial meltdown pulling out of 37 different countries and falling into tens of millions of pounds of debt. This is not the first time they have got into severe financial problems which resulted in selling off all their waste incinerators in the US. Covanta the other bidder (who filed for bankruptcy protection in 2002) has no experience of operating an incinerator in the UK and has not completed the construction of an incinerator for over 15 years. Both companies have been sued for labour violations after treating their workers illegally and prosecution for major pollution leaks.

Can Leeds City Council pull out of the current procurement process?

It is possible for Leeds Council to pull out of the current process. Both Hull City and East Riding Councils pulled out of a contract with a company to build an incinerator at a stage in the process beyond where Leeds is now. Councils in Scotland, Derby City, Bedfordshire and Shropshire have all found reasons to say no to incinerators both domestic and commercial.



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Leeds
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There is an alternative...

The alternatives to incineration are cheaper in the long run, more flexible, quicker to implement, create more jobs and are better for the environment.

The Council should follow the example of other local authorities who are:

1. Increasing the frequency of household collections of recyclables and reducing the frequency of black bin waste collections.
2. Widening the range of materials collected from households to include food waste, glass, all plastics and fabrics.
3. Increase public education on waste by introducing a programme of doorstep information visits.
4. Improve collection of reusable items from households and Civic Amenity sites.
5. Support local recycling businesses to widen the range of materials collected and work in partnership with local businesses who can use recycled materials. Also set up and promote a waste business park.
6. Use better processes to separate recyclable and non recyclable waste.
7. Where recycling isn't possible use biological treatments, Anaerobic digestion and composting technologies to create soil improvers, compost and inert landfill.

Waste processing technology has come on leaps and bounds in the last 5 years. Incineration which has been around for a long time is being superseded by smaller scale more flexible and cheaper solutions. Procurement of a waste solution in Leeds has taken so long that Council officers have had to revise down estimates of the amount of waste that is needed to be processed, as it has become clear that residents are recycling more and producing less waste. This has meant that smaller UK based companies with newer technologies did not put in initial bids. The pfi credits do not have to be used for incineration alternatives are still possible.

For further information on why waste incineration is a bad idea visit:

www.UKWIN.org.uk

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