

Sample email/letter to Oregon State Senators encouraging support
for
SB 488, Oregon's Medical Waste Incinerator Act

Dear Senators,

I am writing to you to urge your support for SB 488, which would close a regulatory loophole around medical waste incineration in Oregon.

There is one large waste incinerator in Oregon. This is the Covanta Marion waste incinerator located in the mid-Willamette Valley. Covanta Marion is classified as a municipal waste incinerator but also burns large amounts of regulated medical waste, the majority of which is imported from outside Oregon.

Compared to municipal waste, burning medical waste releases higher emissions of dangerous toxins such as dioxins, lead, mercury and hydrogen chloride. This is because medical waste contains higher levels of plastics and PVCs. Testing data at Covanta Marion show the facility's dioxin emissions are substantially higher when it burns medical waste (DEQ Review Report No. [24-5398-TV-01](#), p. 62).

In December of 2008, EPA promulgated regulations creating stringent emission standards for medical waste incinerators due to significant concerns over detrimental air quality affecting human health. However, because Covanta Marion mixes municipal, medical, and industrial waste, the Oregon DEQ classifies it as a municipal, rather than a medical waste incinerator. This is despite the fact that Covanta Marion burns enough medical waste to be categorized as a large medical waste incinerator under the 2008 EPA rules. This loophole allows Covanta Marion to operate as a large medical waste incinerator without being held to EPA's stricter air toxic emissions limits for medical waste incinerators. It also allows the facility to import thousands of tons of out-of-state medical waste, making Oregon a dumping ground for waste and pollution other states do not want.

SB 488 would close this loophole by requiring all incinerators in Oregon that burn more than specified amounts of medical waste to meet federal emissions limits for medical waste incinerators. Covanta Marion has emphasized that the facility is being reviewed under the Cleaner Air Oregon program, which regulates toxic air contaminants. However, there is no mechanism in Cleaner Air Oregon to close the loophole without enabling the regulatory authority through the passage of SB 488. Passing SB 488 is critical for protecting Oregon's air quality and public health from toxic pollutants.

Opponents of SB 488 have argued this bill would impact Covanta Marion's ability to accept medical waste, leading to disruptions in the waste stream. However, under SB 488, Covanta can continue to accept all of Oregon's medical waste, which is only 10% of all the medical waste received. Ninety percent, or nearly 15,600 tons of medical waste is out-of-state waste, which will rightfully trigger the stricter limits of SB 488. Furthermore, the concern regarding Covanta's ability to accept medical waste exists regardless of whether SB 488 is passed. Covanta Marion has operated since 1986 and is now older than the average life of most waste incinerators.

The question before the Legislature is whether Oregon will allow the facility to continue polluting at levels that put community health and air quality at risk. Passing SB 488 guarantees that, as Covanta retools to keep the facility open, it will first modernize its outdated pollution control equipment.

SB 488 has overwhelming support from local residents and community groups, who want stronger protections against toxic air pollutants. Please stand with community members in supporting SB 488.

Sincerely,