

# Rachel's Environment & Health News

## #39 - New EPA Report Describes Trends: More Wastes May Be Produced But Fewer Wastes Will Be Re August 23, 1987

A new "overview" of America's hazardous waste problems has been released by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Called "The Hazardous Waste System," the report tries to look at "the big picture" of hazardous waste production and regulation in the U.S. The report finds that 96% (250 million tons) of all hazardous wastes are treated on-site by the companies that produce the wastes; only four percent is shipped off-site to commercial treatment plants. The vast majority of on-site treatment consists of storage in a lagoon (to let the volatiles become airborne), or treatment in a waste-water treatment tank (which also volatilizes many organics). Two million tons are burned in 174 on-site incinerators or in 14 commercial incinerators operating today. Thirteen million tons are sent to about 430 landfills, only 60 of which are commercial (the other 370 being operated by individual waste-generating companies for their own use). Between 22 million and 35 million tons of wastes are deep-well injected.

Soon the EPA will require liners to be put into existing surface impoundments (ponds, lagoons), and the agency expects many companies to close their surface impoundments rather than add expensive liners. The EPA thinks 100 million tons of wastes that used to go into lagoons will soon be discharged into surface waters (rivers, lakes), or into sewage treatment plants; both such discharges are exempt from regulation under RCRA (the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act).

EPA also expects new restrictions on landfilling to increase the demand for offsite commercial treatment facilities; the agency plans to push hard to site new incinerators and new waste-processing plants.

An appendix to the report lists all the commercial hazardous waste landfills, incinerators and deep well injection operations known to the agency in 1985. Curiously, the report does not list the privately-operated on-site facilities that handle 96% of the nation's hazardous wastes.

The report says EPA will release draft regulations for ocean incineration in October, 1987, and will issue final regulations in October, 1988.

The report is available free from the Office of Solid Waste (WH-562A), EPA, 401 M Street, SW, Washington, DC 20460; phone (202) 382-3000, or (800) 424-9346.

--Peter Montague

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### NO VISIBLE PROGRESS IN PREVENTING OR CURING CANCER, SAYS GAO STUDY

Most Americans aren't aware of it, but there's a battle raging around the National Cancer Institute (NCI). President Richard Nixon declared "war on cancer" in 1971, but there's scant evidence to show that any substantial progress has been made in that war. The NCI stresses new surgical techniques and new drug therapies to cure cancer, rather than stressing cancer prevention. Their program has brought the following results, according to the Government Accounting Office (an investigative arm of the U.S. Congress):

The U.S. cancer death rate rose from 162.2 deaths per 100,000 population in 1975 to 170.7 in 1984. If we omit lung cancer, the death rate was 125.4 per 100,000 in 1975 and 125.1 in 1984, which is not a large improvement.

The reported incidence of cancer (how many people were reported to have come down with cancer) in 1975 was 330.5 per 100,000 and 351.8 in 1984. Omitting lung cancer, the incidence rate rose from 285.3 per 100,000 in 1975 to 296.5 in 1984.

"Our cancer program is in big trouble," says Dr. John Bailar III, in

the School of Public Health at Harvard University. The National Cancer Institute vigorously denies this assertion, but the cancer statistics seem to speak more loudly than the agency's words. Maybe it's time to get serious about a cancer prevention program, reducing human exposure to some of the causes of cancer.

--Peter Montague

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Descriptor terms: cancer; nci; federal; overviews; hazardous waste; epa; statistics; landfilling; lagoons; incineration; deep well injection; ocean incineration; formaldehyde; occupational safety and health; indoor air pollution; mobil homes;

### EPA FINALLY AGREES FORMALDEHYDE CAN CAUSE CANCER; MANY AT RISK

The EPA in April, 1987, released a new report that concludes that the common chemical, formaldehyde, is "probably a human carcinogen." The agency took seven years to reach this conclusion. The data that they published in their April report had been submitted to the agency by an industrial laboratory, the respected Chemical Industry Institute of Toxicology (CIIT), in 1980. The EPA "tried to bury questions about formaldehyde," says a report in SCIENCE magazine, the voice of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The EPA estimates that 4662 workers each year will get cancer if they work in an environment contaminated up to the limit currently allowed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which is 3 ppm [parts per million]. In the garment industry alone, 770,000 workers, mostly women, are exposed to fairly high levels of formaldehyde as they press formaldehyde-laden clothes to put "staypressed" creases in chinos, jeans and other clothing.

Another population at risk from formaldehyde is average people living in their homes and mobile homes. The EPA estimates that, at current levels of exposure in typical air in homes, 1170 people die each year from formaldehyde exposure in mobile homes and 630 die in conventional homes.

--Peter Montague

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### EPA'S NEW MASS BURN REGULATIONS

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that the combustion of municipal solid waste "may reasonably be anticipated to contribute to the endangerment of public health and welfare." The agency has, therefore, published an "advance notice of EPA's intent to propose regulation of municipal waste combustor [air] emissions..." under Section 111 of the Clean Air Act. The advance notice appears in the FEDERAL REGISTER July 7, 1987, pgs. 25399-25408.

The advance notice contains much detail that citizens can use. For example, pgs. 25399 through 25340 list 26 separate government publications related to air pollution and potential health problems associated with burning municipal waste. waste.

--Peter Montague

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Descriptor terms: incineration; msw; epa; regulations; formaldehyde; occupational safety and health; indoor air pollution; mobile homes;