

**Notes from the Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum  
Keynote Seminar  
21st Century Waste - corporate and community responsibility  
20 March 2009**

This was a very interesting meeting representing a wide range of views, although primarily focusing on representatives from industry. Speakers included:

**Daniel Instone, Head of Waste Programme, DEFRA**, who gave a presentation on the waste strategy for England - the next steps. (Basically the Waste Strategy 2007). He was challenged by Keith Kondakor from UKWIN on the money going into incineration. He responded by saying that increasing recycling was very important, but smaller scale than CHP. Mr Instone added that, in the waste strategy, the emphasis will be on energy from waste processes that are more carbon efficient, particularly combined heat and power and anaerobic digestion with a clear opposition to more black bag incineration (i.e. with no use for any energy produced).

**Dr Michael Warhurst (from Friends of the Earth)** pointed out that, before the recession, there had been a 2.2% reduction in waste and with the recession the quantity of municipal waste is likely to fall. In spite of this, modelling by DEFRA is still being done on the basis of increased quantities of waste. Mr Instone responded that, in a period of considerable uncertainty, this is something which will have to be revisited and kept under very close review, given the economic downturn.

**David Levy of UKWIN (UK Without Incineration)** asked Mr Instone about the position of the Government and DEFRA on importing waste to fill an incinerator to capacity (if necessary) and he responded that he didn't have any doctrinal objection to importing waste.

The next session was on packaging and minimising waste. **Cllr Ian Mearns of the Local Government Association Environment Board** spoke about the need for industry to reduce packaging and also to produce more easily-recyclable packaging. He pointed out that we throw more into landfill than any equivalent sized country in western Europe and there is much more that can be done in terms of recycling and re-use.

The third session was on The Principles of a Good recycling Service - **Phillip Ward, Director for Local Government Services, WRAP**, started by saying that we haven't yet got a good recycling service. The recycling rate now is 35%, having to reach 43% by 2013 and 50% by 2020. He suggested that it is time people (presumably local authorities) started benchmarking themselves against good standards. He focused on the fact that many people don't recycle because it is made more complicated than it needs to be. WRAP and the local government association are working together to find out what will help people to recycle more.

The next session was on Recovering value from Waste and started with a very pro-incineration talk from **Professor Ian Arbon, Chairman of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers**, although he said he would not use the I word! He said any waste, including cardboard and paper is a renewable fuel source. He pointed out that the UK has a commitment to supply 15% of energy from renewable sources by 2020 and the only way we can do that is by energy from waste. He generally considered recycling to be a waste of energy!

**Colin Drummond, Chief Executive of Viridor** spoke on the value of waste as a source of energy. He also said that Viridor has invested very heavily in recycling - £120 million or so over the past year with a lesser amount invested in energy recovery from waste. He stressed that it is important to get good quality recycle to maximise the return on it but also warned that there is an ongoing risk as markets fluctuate.

He was followed by Dr Michael Warhurst, of Friends of the Earth who very deftly refuted many of the arguments from Professor Arbon.

There were a number of other speakers including the **Head of Environmental Management of Brent Council**, which is aiming to become a zero waste authority, despite having a very large transient population, which makes education about recycling difficult.

During the question and answer session following this presentation, Geraldine asked a question, which has been published in the meeting papers:

Geraldine Lane: From STIFLE in Plymouth.

*Very pleased to hear of Viridor's commitment to recycling and I would like to know on the basis of that, how would Viridor approach a solution for a local authority outline business case that uses increasing waste arising figures while Defra say we have a commitment to a reduction of 50% by 2020 how can we be sure that the authority won't be tied in on the basis of probably inaccurate figures to an unsustainable contract for a large waste incinerator over a 25 year period.*

Paul Sanderson (Chair): Can you answer that in one minute please Colin.

Colin Drummond responded that he didn't think he could in one minute. He explained that it is up to the local authorities to calculate the waste arising that they would expect the companies to deal with and they have to be guided by the councils as to the most appropriate solution for each situation.

The meeting papers also indicated that delegates could submit statements following the meeting, so Geraldine sent in a comment (below) for inclusion with the meeting papers which were distributed to all delegates.

*The Waste Strategy for England 2007 states (Box 1.5): Overall objective for waste policy in securing the future: "Protection of human health and the environment . . ."*

*Quoting from Para 22: "Concern over health effects is most frequently cited in connection with incinerators. Research carried out to date shows no credible evidence of adverse health outcomes for those living near incinerators."*

*In June 2008, however, the Society for Ecological Medicine published an updated version of the paper: "The Health Effects of Waste Incinerators".*

*This is an in-depth report, from a highly-respected professional body. In their introduction the authors state: "We also highlight recent research which has demonstrated the very high releases of dioxin that arise during start-up and shut-down of incinerators. This is especially worrying as most assumptions about the safety of modern incinerators are based only on emissions which occur during standard operating conditions. Of equal concern is the likelihood that these dangerously high emissions will not be detected by present monitoring systems for dioxins."*

*In the Foreword Professor C.V. Howard of the Centre for Molecular Biosciences at the University of Ulster states "the weight of evidence, collected within this report, is sufficient in the authors' opinion to call for the phasing out of incineration as a way of dealing with our waste. I agree with that."*

*Within the report, the authors state:*

*"Two large cohort studies in America have shown that fine (PM2.5) particulate air pollution causes increases in all-cause mortality, cardiovascular mortality and mortality from lung cancer, after adjustment for other factors. A more recent, well-designed study of morbidity and mortality in postmenopausal women has confirmed this, showing a 76% increase in cardiovascular and 83% increase in cerebrovascular mortality in women exposed to higher levels of fine particulates. These fine particulates are primarily produced by combustion processes and are emitted in large quantities by incinerators.*

- Higher levels of fine particulates have been associated with an increased prevalence of asthma and COPD.*
- Fine particulates formed in incinerators in the presence of toxic metals and organic toxins (including those known to be carcinogens), adsorb these pollutants and carry them into the blood stream and into the cells of the body."*

*"Incinerators are permitted to emit particulates at a rate of 10mg per cubic metre of gaseous discharge. The commonly-used baghouse filters act like a sieve, effectively allowing the smallest particulates to get through and blocking the less dangerous, larger particulates. Only 5-30% of the PM2.5s will be removed by these filters and virtually none of the PM0.1s. In fact the majority of particles emitted by incinerators are the most dangerous ultrafine particulates. The baghouse filters are least effective at removing the smallest particles, especially those of 0.2 to 0.3 microns, and these will have a considerable health impact."*

*Many groups around the country have expressed concern at the evidence which is now coming to light about the risks imposed by waste incinerators. In view of the fact that the Society of Ecological Medicine report was published after the Waste Strategy for England, I would urge DEFRA to reconsider the assurances given in para 22 to reflect the concerns raised by Drs Thompson and Anthony.*

*Geraldine Lane is Chair of STIFLE (Stop The Incinerator Fouling Land at Ernesettle), Plymouth, a group set up by residents living in Plymouth and Saltash, who are opposed to the proposal by South West Devon Waste Partnership to site a waste facility on the bank of the River Tamar.*