

Submission to the EPA oral hearing on the proposed Indaver incinerators in Ringaskiddy by Councillor Dominick Donnelly of Passage West Town Council

My name is Dominick Donnelly. I am a politician and an environmentalist. I am here as a member of the Town Council in Passage West, and therefore I have the great honour of representing the people of Passage West, Monkstown and Glenbrook, an area which has a population of over 4000 people. I am a member of the Green Party / Comhaontas Glas and within the Green Party, I hold the position of National Co-Ordinator, which means that I chair the party's National Executive Committee. I have been a member of CHASE since it started, and I have been fighting, along with my many colleagues, these Indaver incinerator proposals for the last four years. In the local elections of June 2004 I was given a mandate by the people of Passage West to work towards creating a safe, clean, healthy environment for all to live in, and as I see it, and integral part of this mandate is to oppose the construction of these incinerators. As I was canvassing door to door during the election, it was made brutally clear to me that there is little or no public support for the proposed incinerators, despite what John Ahern claims.

I will demonstrate the reasons for my opposition to the incinerators under the following headings:

- Health
- The EPA
- Our "Government"
- Indaver
- Truth

1) Health

Incinerators produce dioxins, furans and other toxic chemicals.
Dioxins and furans are detrimental to human health.
Ergo incinerators are detrimental to human health.

If you take the above statements to be statements of fact, which I do, then it is obvious that incinerators pose a threat to human health, and the health of all living organisms. The question then is: **"Is the threat to human health posed by incinerators an acceptable threat?"** I would argue that it is not.

There is a threat to your health every time you cross the road, but we consider this an acceptable risk as we **need** to cross roads, and we put in place many restrictions designed to make crossing the road safer, such as speed restrictions, pedestrian crossings and so on. Most of our vehicles produce pollution which is detrimental to our health, but we accept this as a necessary evil as we **need** the mobility which the vehicles give us, and again we have put in place measures to minimise the risks, such as catalytic converters, cleaner and more efficient engines and so on. There are countless other examples of activities which, while we concede they pose a risk to human health, we consider that risk acceptable as we consider the activity **necessary**, and we put in place procedures to minimise the risk to human health from that activity.

When it comes to incineration however, we have a problem. Proof of Evidence - Health Impacts of Incineration, with particular reference to the Toxicological Effects of Ultrafine Particulate Aerosols and Organo-Chlorines by Dr. Vyvyan Howard of Liverpool University gives a detailed analysis of many of the detrimental health effects of the emissions from incinerators, particularly on children and foetuses. The French Government Report on Effects of Incinerator Emissions on Rates of Cancer and Birth Defects gives details of substantially increased rates of cancer and birth defects such as congenital heart defects in populations living in the vicinity of incinerators. A report a few years ago in The Journal Of Epidemiology And Community Health, published by the British Medical Journal, carried out by Newcastle University, indicates that there are substantial increases in Spina Bifida & congenital heart defects around incinerators. Dr. Gavin Ten Tuscher outlined to the An Bord Pleanála oral hearing his research showing that there is a much higher incidence of orofacial deformities in the vicinity of incinerators. There is no such thing as a safe level of dioxins as they accumulate in the fatty tissue and are listed among the most toxic substances known to man. **All of the above proves that incinerators pose a substantial threat to human health.**

This leads to the question: **“Are incinerators a necessary evil?”** I argue that they are not. Firstly incinerators do not dispose of any waste, they merely convert it to other forms, namely a mixture of gases and ultrafine solid particles which are expelled into the atmosphere via the stack, and a residual ash which must then be buried in a toxic landfill site. Incineration is part of the flawed mentality that waste is something to be somehow disposed of, rather than a commodity to be reused and recycled. Under the waste hierarchy which is officially part of the waste policy of the Government of this country, waste minimisation, reuse and recycling all must come before disposal methods such as incineration and landfill. Regrettably our Government has done almost nothing about implementing its own waste policy, so our infrastructure for waste minimisation, reuse and recycling is laughable. It is imperative for the future sustainability (and I mean sustainability in the true environmental meaning of the word, not the meaning of the word which the economists have hijacked) of the country that the Government implement immediately a zero waste approach to waste, where the residual fraction of waste that must go for disposal is reduced as close to zero as possible. Such policies have been successfully implemented in many parts of the world without the need for incineration, and it has been proven, for example in Sweden, that the availability of incineration mitigates strongly against the successful implementation of a zero waste policy.

I therefore conclude this section by stating quite categorically that incinerators pose severe threats to human health which are unacceptable as the incinerators are not necessary. The director general of the EPA, Dr. Mary Kelly, has in a letter to the Minister for Health, asserted that it is not within the remit of the EPA to examine the health implications of this proposal, and An Bord Pleanála made it clear that it is not within their remit, **so who will take responsibility for the health of the people of Cork Harbour?** It is my contention and the contention of the Green Party that there is absolutely no way these incinerators should be built, or if they are proved necessary, they cannot be built without at least establishing a baseline health study of the residents of Cork City and the Lower Harbour area. Such a study has been promised for years, but has never happened. **Why not? What are they afraid of finding out?**

2) The Environmental Protection Agency

The mission statement of the Environmental Protection Agency is as follows:

“To protect and improve the natural environment for present and future generations, taking into account the environmental, social and economic principles of sustainable development.”

I quite simply state that the EPA has not been doing this. It has quite simply been issuing pollution licenses, and should therefore change its name to the **Licence to Pollute Authority (LPA)**, or more correctly the **Licence to Print Money Authority (LPMA)**. It should change its mission statement to something like the following, which is more reflective of the role it actually plays in society:

“To pretend to protect and improve the natural environment, while issuing pollution licences which allow anyone who asks for one to make a lot of money while spewing whatever toxins and pollutants they want into the environment.”

This may seem harsh, but I believe it to be closer to reality than their actual mission statement above. If the EPA is to live up to its actual mission statement, they must be given the funding, legislation and human resources necessary to carry out its duties to the Irish people properly. It must also become truly independent. There are many fine committed employees within the EPA, but they have to work for overlords who are nothing more than political lackeys, appointed by the Government to look after the interests of the business community, and whose mantra seems to be: **Profit before People**. It must also become truly accountable to the Irish people, with its immunity from prosecution lifted and a meaningful process of real consultation with the Irish people, rather than this farce. **Where is the EPA expert on incineration who will come before us and allay our fears?**

3) Our "Government"

_____government – group of people ruling a county (Harrap's English mini dictionary)

Who are our Government? Who really rules our country? Theoretically we live in a democracy. However more and more key decisions in this country are being made behind closed doors by unelected and unaccountable people. For example the responsibility for drawing up waste management plans has been removed from the elected county and city councillors of the country, and given to the unelected appointees of the Minister for the Environment, the county and city managers. Similarly An Bord Pleanála (more ministerial appointees) decided to grant planning permission for the Toxic Waste incinerator in Ringaskiddy for no reason other than that it is Government policy, and ignoring the 14 reasons given by the inspector they appointed to investigate the case as to why planning permission should be refused. How is it that John Ahern and Indaver can have a breakfast meeting with our Taoiseach, while CHASE cannot get a meeting with neither the Taoiseach, nor the Minister for the Environment, nor the Minister for Health, nor the local minister, the Minister for Trade and Enterprise, despite repeated requests? Is it that they are afraid of Mary O'Leary or Mary Hurley or Kevin Barry or any of the rest of the members of CHASE? CHASE is a collection of local community based groups in the harbour area who collected over 30,000 signatures against these proposed incinerators, and yet that doesn't seem to matter a damn to our political mandarins. However if Owen O'Callaghan wants someone to launch a project connected to Mahon Point, Bertie comes running down to Cork to do the honours. Do the legitimate opinions of those 30,000 Cork people matter less than the opinions of John Ahern or Owen O'Callaghan? I ask the question again: Who really rules our country? **Is it the people whose names are on the ballot paper, or are they just puppets for those with money and influence?**

4) Indaver

Indaver Ireland, the applicants in this licence hearing, are a wholly owned subsidiary of Indaver NV, a Flemish waste management company. The record of Indaver NV in running its incinerators is far from exemplary, with its Antwerp facility having been shown to have exceeded its permitted emissions of dioxins by a colossal factor. **Can we have any faith in Indaver Ireland to run its affairs any better?**

What motivates Indaver Ireland? Why do they want to build incinerators in Ringaskiddy? The only answer I can find is **money**. It is all about profit. It is all so that John Ahern and others can earn large salaries while making huge profits for the parent company in Belgium. It seems to me that it is all about the love of money. That is the only conclusion I can draw. Nobody could possibly want to build an incinerator for any other reason except to make money from it. May I quote from the Holy Bible, King James Version, from the first letter of St. Paul to Timothy, chapter 6, verse 10:

"For the love of money is the root of all evil"

Does Indaver Ireland love money? Does John Ahern love money? For what other reason could they be here? I can see none.

5) Truth

In proceedings such as these, with both sides contesting that what they are saying is right, it is hard to ascertain where the truth lies. Indaver rely heavily on a number of key documents which profess support for incineration, such as an elderly document from the United Nations, the National Hazardous Waste Management Plan and a document from the Food Safety Authority, which Indaver have already referred to in their questioning of Natasha Harty. Natasha talked in her submission about there being two sources of information on incineration: the sources from various official bodies, and those from a few independent sources, usually people who have lived in close proximity to incinerators. I would contest that many of the documents from official sources are not so much based on scientific truth, but more based on political expediency. Many, if not all such documents come about through a process where they go through various

drafts, and there is much political and other lobbying that contributes to their final makeup. There is, in my opinion, a paucity of reliable independent analysis of incineration and its effects. This is because there is little independent research being carried out, as all universities and scientific institutions rely largely on corporate sponsorship to fund their research. What independent documentation there is on the health effects of incineration is to say the least frightening, and I would say therefore that the precautionary principle dictates that there should be no more incinerators built until there is reliable, independent research assuring the public of their safety. To quote the poet Keats:

“Beauty is truth, truth is beauty, -that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

I fail to see any beauty in an incinerator.

While on the subject of truth, the media have an important role to play here, and I thank those here for their coverage, as it is through the media that most people get the information on which they base their decisions on such matters as incineration. I would particularly like to thank 96 FM, The Irish Examiner, The Irish Times and The Evening Echo for their coverage to date. I note the absence of any meaningful coverage of this hearing in the Irish Independent, which has as its subtitle “Ireland’s Best-Selling Daily Newspaper”. It seems, from their absence here, that the Irish Independent have a very low opinion of the people of Cork Harbour and surrounding areas. I call on all people in Cork to therefore show what they think of the Irish Independent by boycotting it, and I further call on all people here to ask their local newsagents not to stock the Irish Independent. This may seem a far fetched response, but the only conclusion I can draw from their absence is that they do not want to inform their readers of the truth about incineration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I call on the EPA to stand up and be counted for once, and not to grant a licence to these wasteful, expensive and dangerous incinerators, so that the good people of CHASE can go back to their lives, doing their jobs and rearing their children. That is the only logical result from this hearing.

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